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MOLIÈRE

By LEON H. VINCENT

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To

FRANCIS WILSON

In memory of days and nights in the library of
'The Orchard'

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MOLIÈRE

THE play was over and the audience was dispersing. The streets adjacent to the Petit-Bourbon resounded with laughter, argument, protestation. A passer-by who mingled with the crowd and overheard the talk could hardly have failed to note how varied and discordant the opinions were. These people had just witnessed a performance, by the 'Comédiens de Mon-

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sieur frère unique du roi,' of a new and clever little dramatic satire. It was evident from their manner that the piece, though amusing enough, had displayed some unwonted quality, that its humors were not of a superficial kind.

A number of spectators confessed to having enjoyed the performance in spite of themselves. Others had been vastly entertained because the wit seemed to be directed at people they knew. A few were downright angry, and hinted at the vengeance it was possible to wreak upon profane satirists. Their immediate neighbors, with more reason to be indignant than themselves, laughed and were disposed to take it all in good part. Whatever else was accomplished the play had unquestionably aroused discussion. The

dramatist had held the mirror up to nature. People looked into the glass and were so astonished that they began at once to protest that the mirror was distorted. Little as they were gratified by the spectacle, they seemed in no danger of forgetting what manner of men they were.

This fashionable audience was apparently less concerned about the authorship of the play than about the play itself. Not half of them knew, or cared to know, who wrote it. The bystander might now and then have caught the name of Molière, coupled with some phrase expressive of admiration for this actor's brilliant performance in the rôle of Mascarille. But the whole affair was of far less importance to the spectators at the Petit-Bourbon than to us,

who look back upon that day as epoch-making in the history of dramatic literature. The players, for all that they bore a high-sounding title, were not especially noteworthy. In the opinion of Parisians this was only a little provincial troupe, newly come to town within a year, fortunate in having taken the fancy of the young king, who liked to be amused, and who found the new players able to do and say very laughable things. Had the people of quality who assisted at the performance that day been questioned they would have explained that comic actors, though quite diverting, were a much lower order of being than the stately kings and queens of tragedy who chanted the great verses of Corneille, for example, at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Among the spectators thronging the hall of the Petit-Bourbon that November afternoon of the year 1659 was Jean Chapelain, of the Académie française, he who, four years later, was to figure conspicuously among the King's beneficiaries as 'the greatest French poet that ever was' — a characterization which he accepted with unabashed content and no apparent sense of incongruity. Gilles Ménage was also present. The two scholars met when the play was over. Ménage took Chapelain by the hand and said to him, 'Monsieur, you and I approved all those follies which have just been criticised so ingeniously and with such good sense; but now, as Saint Remi said to Clovis, we shall be obliged to burn what we adored and adore what

we burned.' Ménage, who himself records the incident, says that it turned out as he predicted. After that first performance of the *Précieuses ridicules* there was an end to verbal absurdities and affected style.

Ménage is suspected of having made his 'prediction' after the event. In any case it is a question whether the reform was as sudden or radical as he affirms. The revolt from the jargon of the 'ruelles' had begun long before 1659. But up to this moment no wit had ridiculed the coteries with such fresh gayety as Molière displayed. Other satirists had tried, in a dull, heavy fashion, to make 'preciosity' absurd. The chief result of their efforts was to confirm the précieuses in their folly and to make the spectators yawn. Molière

almost convinced the précieuses that it was worth their while to join in the laugh at their own expense.

The year 1659, of such high importance in Molière's life, is of no little significance in the life of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. It is like a sign-post which points two ways. It is an early date in the history of the great dramatist, and a late date in the history of the great house. The fact should be kept in mind, inasmuch as one object of this series of brief studies is to show the influence of polite society on literature. The story of the Hôtel de Rambouillet really comes to an end with the production of *les Précieuses ridicules*. The aged Marquise herself is believed to have been present on this occasion and to have joined in the applause at

the many palpable hits made in the comedy. She was a woman of wit, and it is wholly unreasonable to suppose that she could not enjoy a satire upon the third and fourth rate salons, the feeble and absurd imitations of the once famous, and justly famous, Blue Room.

So far as Molière is concerned, this play may be accounted an index showing the path which the new comedy was to take. All the characteristics of the great Frenchman's art are epitomized in this lively attack upon the affectations of the ruelles. In the *Précieuses ridicules* Molière completely emancipated himself from the fetters of the traditional comedy of intrigue. He took his subject from the vivid Present. He learned that he had only to study Nature. Above all he became mili-

tant; and among the many characteristics of Molière's drama none is more marked than its militant spirit. The man was ever a fighter. It is no inadequate account of his life which describes it as an unremitting war against hypocrisy. To forget this would be to forget Molière's own words: 'It is my belief that in the work in which I find myself engaged I can do nothing better than to attack, through mocking portraiture, the vices of my time.' He was militant at the outset of his career as a dramatist, and during the fourteen years of his Parisian life, a period crowded to the full with responsibilities and labors of all sorts, he was never anything else.

I

PARIS is so rich in historical and literary shrines that it is able to gratify the pilgrim with the bewildering spectacle of two houses in which Molière was certainly born, and two in which he unquestionably died. In such an embarrassment of riches one can hardly be too conservative. The student learns at the outset that about half of all he reads and hears is almost of necessity untrue.

The tablet of black marble placed

on the front of No. 96 Rue Saint-Honoré, about a quarter of a century ago, bears an inscription to the effect that it marks the site of the house in which Molière was born, January 15, 1622. The admirer will be fairly safe in paying his tribute of sentiment at this place. For if it is difficult to prove that the poet was born here, it is even more difficult to show that he must have been born somewhere else.

The house now standing at the corner of Rue Saint-Honoré and Rue des Vieilles-Étuves is comparatively modern. The original edifice of Molière's time was a 'picturesque construction of the sixteenth century,' with gables and projecting stories, and small arched windows of leaded glass. At the corner of the house was a carved

wooden post of the sort not uncommon in old Paris. This 'poteau cornier' represented the trunk of an orange-tree, up which swarmed a group of young monkeys eager for the fruit, while an old monkey waited below. The house was known as the 'pavillon des Singes' from this decoration. The eyes of the future poet must often have rested with amused delight upon the quaint figures. It is believed that when Molière invented a coat of arms for himself and placed for supports on either side the shield a monkey, one holding a mirror and the other a theatrical mask, he had in mind the grotesque and laughable carvings on the old house in Rue Saint-Honoré.

The family to which Molière be-

longed came originally from Beauvais. Jean Poquelin, a tradesman of that place, had a son Jean who established himself in Paris as a 'marchand tapissier.' He married Agnès Mazuel, a daughter of one of the 'Violons du Roi.' They had ten children, the eldest of whom, Jean, became the father of the dramatic poet. This Jean Poquelin was also a 'marchand tapissier.' His wife was the daughter of a 'tapissier,' Louis Cressé. They were married April 22, 1621. Their first-born, known to all the world as Molière, was baptized on Saturday, the 15th of January, 1622. The entry in the register of the parish of Saint-Eustache calls him 'Jean, son of Jean Pouguelin, upholsterer, and of Marie Cresé, his wife.' The name of the mother should

have been spelled with a double s. But in those days correct spelling was an undiscovered art. The orthography of names (if orthography be the right word), was altogether in a 'fluid and passing' state. The name borne by Molière's father is found in the civil records spelled in eight or nine different ways, among which are Pocquelin, Poclin, and Pauquelin. 'The true name of his family was Poquelin.'

Two years later another child of this house was christened Jean, and therefore the elder son received the name of Jean-Baptiste. When he went upon the stage Jean-Baptiste Poquelin took the name of Molière, for reasons satisfactory to himself and inexplicable to other people. The change could hardly have been made

for the purpose of acquiring distinction, since the assumed name was not only rather common but was also borne by a well-known master of ballet, Louis de Mollier or Molière, with whom the poet was often confounded. However, these improvements and changes of style are so nearly universal in the theatrical profession, and so frequent in the literary, as to require no special explanation in the case of the great French dramatist.

The father of Molière held the position of 'tapissier valet de chambre' to the king. It was a hereditary charge, and was considered highly profitable if only because of the prestige it carried in the minds of people who like a sofa cushion a little better for having been made by royalty's own uphol-

sterer. There were eight of these craftsmen, each of whom bore the title of valet de chambre. The period of their service was three months. They received three hundred livres in wage besides gratuities to the amount of about thirty-seven livres and six sous. Jean Poquelin was a respectable, well-to-do, and influential member of the middle class. He was thought to be close-fisted at times, but he lived in something like luxury and took no small comfort in the wealth he had acquired.

The mother of the poet was a woman of taste and distinction. If she had but few books we know that the few included a Bible and a Plutarch. She died at the early age of thirty-one, leaving four children; little

Jean-Baptiste was in his eleventh year at the time of this his first great bereavement. After twelve months of widowerhood the father married again. Catherine Fleurette, the second wife, bore her husband two daughters and then died, just three and a half years after her marriage.

We are warned by that conservative scholar and sound critic, Louis Moland, not to accept with rash enthusiasm or reject with disdain the various traditions concerning Molière's youth and dramatic career. One of these traditions says that the boy's maternal grandfather, Louis Cressé, used to take him to the performances at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and therefore must be held chiefly responsible for having opened Molière's eyes to the

possibility of a career so glorious that the profession of upholsterer to the king seemed commonplace in contrast. To assume this is, as Moland says, to assume too much. Few boys have not had at some time or other a passion for the stage. Molière doubtless enjoyed his first play-going experiences in the company of his grandfather, but it seems more reasonable to trace his deeper interest in theatrical things to the practical experience in dramatics got at the famous Jesuit school known as the Collège de Clermont.

Molière was a pupil here from October, 1636, to August, 1641. The school was large and fashionable, numbering seventeen hundred day-pupils and three hundred boarders.

LIBRARY OF THE

Among the names enrolled were to be found representatives of such great families as Conti, Rohan, Montmorency, Richelieu, and Crequi. There was a faculty of three hundred members. The instruction combined the best offered by the traditions of the past with an unusual amount of modern science; it has been remarked with surprise that the Jesuit fathers taught chemistry, 'or what passed for such.' They paid unusual attention to what Lord Chesterfield in his day called 'the graces.' In this school, where every recitation was rigorously conducted in Latin, and where Latin was used in the dining-room and even on the playground, no little care was bestowed upon the art of dancing. At certain times in the year, notably when the

general distribution of prizes took place, plays and ballets were produced. The reverend fathers wrote many of these little pieces, in which the more gifted pupils displayed their talents both elocutionary and terpsichorean. To the influences brought to bear upon him at the Jesuit college Loiseleur attributes Molière's 'unhappy taste' for tragedy and his consummate skill in the composition of ballets.

Among his fellow pupils young Poquelin could reckon the Prince de Conti, younger brother of Condé; also Hesnault, Bernier, and Chapelle. The three last mentioned were his intimate friends. If Molière met the young prince at all it would be only in the classroom.

Chapelle was a natural son of Luillier, the 'maître des comptes,' a friend and patron of Gassendi. To Luillier must be given the credit of having made it possible for these four lads, Hesnault, Bernier, Chapelle, and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, to enjoy lessons from Gassendi. Cyrano de Bergerac also became a member of the circle. Grimarest says that the Gascon forced himself upon the little party of youthful philosophers, and that it was a problem how to get rid of him. They solved it by letting him remain. Cyrano may have used adroit and insinuating ways to get admitted, but he had wit enough to make himself agreeable and amusing when once of the number.

After finishing his 'humanities'

and completing such studies under Gassendi as his father's plans allowed, Molière went to Orléans to study law. No small pains have been taken to determine the extent of the poet's legal knowledge. This much at least is clear, that when Molière uses the phraseology of law he not only uses it exactly, but also with the ease and spontaneity of one who is not parading knowledge got up for the occasion. Some emphasis too may be laid upon the fact that Molière never satirizes the lawyers as he does the physicians. Perhaps, knowing them as he did, he liked and respected them; perhaps he had some traces of sentiment about a profession with which he was at one time closely allied.

It is amusing to find that after

graduating from the Collège de Clermont and taking his law degree at the University of Orléans, Molière was put to the study of arithmetic and penmanship. This was a special training for a mercantile pursuit, a parallel to which could easily be found at the present day. If we may conclude that the study of law was looked upon merely as part of a liberal education, it is safe to assume that the young man was now at issue with his father on the subject of his career in life. The question was whether or not he should be allowed to give up the honorable profession of hereditary upholsterer to the king for the disreputable business of play-acting. The problem is constantly recurring, and has every time to be solved anew on

the individual merits of the case. No general principle can be found to govern all instances. It is still possible to find an occasional actor who would have graced the upholstery business. On the other hand, what scholar or critic will presume fully to estimate the loss to the stage and to literature had not Molière followed his bent with almost blind recklessness? The testimony of friends and enemies alike goes to show that his passion for the theatre in all its forms had become a frenzy. There is no cure for madness of this sort; it must run its course. The young man probably scandalized his father by the ease with which he put aside all the important concerns of life to run after players. Charles Dickens, it is said, had so profound an

interest in the stage that he would witness the most commonplace acting patiently and sympathetically. He derived a certain pleasure from the efforts of these people — a pleasure totally unmixed with cynicism. In much the same spirit only with greater intensity young Molière, after his return from Orléans, proceeded to slake his thirst for things dramatic. He drank in greedily whatever Paris had to give. 'Great comedians and small, Italian and French, tragic and comic, buffoons and jugglers, he followed and saw them all.'

Nor was he content to be a mere spectator. The story of Molière and the two 'charlatans' of the Pont-Neuf is thought to have a foundation in fact, though told upon the authority

of the poet's bitterest enemy. It is found in a satiric comedy entitled *Élomire hypocondre ou les Médecins vengés*, by Le Boulanger de Chalussay. The name Élomire is an anagram of Molière. The author of the play was intimately acquainted with many facts of Molière's life. He knew so much that it often requires the most delicate criticism to determine the line between truth and fiction. He sneers at the poet for having in those early days so completely devoted himself to whatever in the remotest way touched upon theatrical affairs. Molière is accused of having lost his head to the extent of applying for a position of assistant to the sleight-of-hand performers of the Pont-Neuf. Moland

characterizes this story as 'an absurd invention.'

There is more ground for believing the tradition that Molière studied the method of the famous Italian mime known to the public under the name of Scaramouche. Vermeulen's portrait of Scaramouche has under it a quatrain, one line of which says, —

Il fut le maître de Molière.

The author of the play of *Élomire hypocondre* elaborates this tradition, and pictures Molière standing before the Italian comedian with a mirror in his hand in which he studies the varying expressions of his own face as he tries to master the lesson of Scaramouche. Now he personates the unhappy or the deceived husband, jealous, raging at heart. 'There is no movement,

posture, or grimace which this great scholar of the greatest of buffoons does not do, over and over again, hundreds of times.' Livet's edition of *Élomire hypocondre* contains a facsimile of the rare old engraving showing Molière, looking-glass in hand, taking his lesson in facial expression. A story told in such detail and with such liveliness of manner undoubtedly has some basis in truth.

The break with his father and with all the traditions of his family came when in June, 1643, Molière signed the contract drawn up by ten actors and actresses (including three members of the famous Béjart family) for the purpose of organizing a new dramatic company to be known as the 'Illustre Théâtre.' The name of Jean-

Baptiste Poquelin comes third on the list; he was then twenty-three years of age. The seventh name is that of 'Magdelaine Béjart,' a clever young actress with whom Molière was known to be deeply enamoured. Tallemant des Réaux states the common opinion of her merits when he speaks of her as a gifted comédienne, and records the current gossip when he says that 'a young fellow by the name of Molière left the benches of the Sorbonne to follow her.' Tallemant is in error more than once, as when he speaks of Molière at the Sorbonne; enough remains, however, to show that love of Madeleine Béjart as well as love of comedy must be reckoned among the motives which prompted Molière to embark upon a theatrical career. The

company is thought to have been composed at first of amateurs, who, after playing several months for pleasure, determined to make a profession of what had hitherto been a pastime.[1]

The audacity and light-heartedness of youth must partly account for this title of the 'Illustre Théâtre.' In a contract made with the dancer, Daniel Mallet, occurs for the first time, so far as we know, the name which was to become world-famous through the genius of him who adopted it — the name of Molière. Young Poquelin was not merely content to assume a more euphonious cognomen than the one borne by his father and grandfather, but he must needs improve upon im-

[1] Larroumet: *La Comédie de Molière*, Paris, 1887, p. 77.

provement by giving that name the prefix *de*. The new company of players was illustrious, and of its members one, at least, was noble! All this was innocently done, and perhaps wholly in the spirit of that member of the Petit Cénacle described by Gautier who turned plain Jean into Jehan and got indescribable satisfaction from his Gothic *h*. Moreover, there are many things one can do at the age of twenty-five for which he will have no heart after he is forty.

The elder Poquelin by no means gave over his efforts to persuade the prodigal son to relinquish a foolish undertaking. He sent Georges Pinel, who had been Molière's writing-master, to argue with the young man and if possible bring him to hear reason.

Pinel undertook the mission with enthusiasm and presented his patron's cause with eloquence. Molière's eloquence, however, was the greater. He not only was not persuaded, but he actually induced Pinel to leave his pupils and join the new dramatic company. The susceptible writing-master was flattered by being told that his stock of Latin would perfectly fit him to play the rôle of 'docteur,' and that he would find acting a far more agreeable mode of life than keeping a boarding school. Pinel's name appears in the agreement for organizing the 'Illustre Théâtre.'

The fortunes of the new company were almost wholly disastrous. The comedians, no doubt, played their parts with vivacity and skill; the pub-

lic, however, was not greatly moved. Auditors came, but not in sufficient numbers, and salaries cannot be paid in appreciation. The 'Illustre Théâtre' tried various quarters of Paris only to meet with the same rebuff, in each new locality. They were like a well-known character in a certain book of humor in that they were 'endowed with the very genius of ill-luck.' Their first performances were given in the jeu de paume (tennis-court) known as 'Métayers,' from Nicholas and Louis Métayer, its first proprietors. Six months later they moved to jeu de paume 'de la Croix-Noire' near Port Saint-Paul. It was thought that they might thrive among the wits and amateurs of literature who frequented this quarter. Disappointed

here, they moved again, this time to 'Croix-Blanche' in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; 'and for the third time they found only the desert.'

For Molière himself the next four years constituted a period of personal disappointment and mortification in addition to the misery he shared with his fellow-players. Paraphrasing a famous epigram: To make a failure is at any time a sin; but to make a failure in the presence of unsympathetic neighbors and critical relatives is worse — it is a blunder. A young man who proposes to play the fool should go away from home to do it. Nothing illustrates better the tenacity of Molière's purpose than the history of his connection with the 'Illustre Théâtre.' He made intimate acquaintance with

the seamy side of Seventeenth Century theatrical life. He knew the money-lenders and usurers, the pawnbrokers and the sheriffs. At one time he was imprisoned in the Châtelet for a debt of a hundred and forty-three livres owed to Antoine Fausser, dealer in candles. There were yet other debts for which he might have suffered detention had not a friend, Léonard Aubry, 'paveur des batiments du roi,' come to his help. Molière's father has been roundly abused for not showing himself active and conspicuous in backing up his son in these theatrical ventures. Such abuse is both superfluous and uncritical. The doctrine may be old-fashioned, but not necessarily unsound, that fathers should be allowed some independ-

ence of judgment and action even when they happen to be the fathers of distinguished men. Twelve years were yet to elapse before Molière should have fully justified his choice of a profession. Jean Poquelin, the upholsterer, lived to see his eldest son almost at the height of his contemporary fame. Yet it were gratuitous to assume that the old man cared to or could fully appreciate the nature of the son's triumph. For the sake of sturdy human nature and to the end that examples of the 'man of character' may exist in all ages and in every country, it is to be hoped that Jean Poquelin died unreconciled to his son's course.

There being no immediate future for the 'Illustre Théâtre' in Paris,

save a future made up of poverty and failure, they determined to go into the provincial towns. Where dramatic entertainments were fewer than in the metropolis they might at least get a hearing. The precise moment of departure is unknown; it probably occurred some time 'during the last months of 1645 or the beginning of 1646.' Nor is it certain what members of the original company united with Madeleine Béjart and Molière in this new venture. For the next twelve years the poet led the nomadic life of a provincial Thespian. With all its hardships and deprivations, its vulgarity and ennui, this section of Molière's history is to be accounted of highest importance in his intellectual and artistic development.

II

THE most superficial acquaintance with the methods of biographers makes clear how absolutely essential it is that the lives of great men should 'fall into periods.' Imagine the blow to the orthodox conception of biographical criticism if we were not allowed to picture a great dramatic poet repeating the syllables in each line of verse 'to ascertain if they developed the style of metre it was his duty to posterity to be using at that special

period of his life.' In other words, the critics must have 'periods,' if they have to invent them.

It is a relief to find that now and then these divisions actually occur in the life of a man of letters quite of their own accord. The mere change of locale makes the years of Molière's provincial wanderings stand out in marked contrast to all that goes before and all that follows.

There fell to his share certain responsibilities of which he had hitherto known but little. He became the director of the troupe, if not at once, certainly very soon after the beginning of the provincial tour. He rose to this position by his gift for leadership. He was a born drill-master. It rarely happens that men with the faculty for

control do not find something upon which to exercise their powers; and if they have the ability to control in a great way the opportunity is sure to arise. The doctrine of 'mute inglorious Miltons' and 'village Hampdens' is a very pretty one, but it is as absurd as it is poetical; your real Hampden does not find the 'village tyrant' a foeman of sufficient importance.

Molière was not only an actor and a manager, but he became a writer. This might have happened in Paris quite as well as in the provinces, but I believe the pressure of necessity helped to awaken his inventive powers. In the city he could have procured plays; in the country it was not an easy matter, and he must make them. Aside from that always power-

ful motive, mere gratification of the instinct for authorship, such an additional incentive as the positive need to have a new play at a given time was an immense stimulus. We can hardly overestimate its force.

The provinces, too, were an excellent field for the observer of human nature. Society was immobile. Strange characters abounded. Men lived, died, and were buried in the towns where they were born. He who travelled a hundred miles was something of an adventurer, and was held in becoming reverence when he got home. Men who had been to Paris took marked precedence over their fellow-citizens and had argument, not for a week but for the rest of their natural days. Strangers coming to these lesser towns

and villages were as great a curiosity to the inhabitants as the inhabitants were to them. Even to a youth who had been brought up in the shadow of the Parisian markets 'where wit had flourished from time immemorial,' who knew the varied life of the Collége de Clermont and the halls of the University of Orléans, and who had endured the buffets which Fortune bestows upon most dramatic tyros, — even to such a youth the provinces must have seemed rich in material for the study of human nature.

The most marked contrast of all would be found in the opening up of vast tracts of unfilled time. The busy hum of men may be heard in market-towns as well as in towered cities, but it is never so unremitting in the one as

in the other. 'What do you do with your time?' inquires the cockney of the villager, and the latter cannot give a really satisfactory answer. Busy as he was and exacting as were his responsibilities, Molière must have had, now and then, the sense of a larger leisure than he had hitherto known. And it was in part due to this, I firmly believe, that he became 'so deep contemplative.'

The early history of Molière's provincial campaigns is quite obscure. When Taschereau published, in 1828, the second edition of his *Histoire de la Vie et des Ouvrages de Molière*, he was compelled to acknowledge that 'all the circumstances of Molière's life from the beginning of 1646 up to 1653 were almost entirely unknown.'

By a careful study of the civil registers in various parts of the south and east of France, many blanks in our information have been supplied; though it is not yet possible to trace the wanderings of the company step by step. However, as a biographer has happily expressed it, while we may not know at a given instant just where Molière and his people are, we may be sure that they will not be long out of sight.

The two sorts of documents which furnish indisputable proof of the presence of the company in a given place are the registers in which were inscribed the permission of the municipal authorities to give a performance in the town, and the 'actes de l'état civil' which contain records of the

baptism of such children as were born into the theatrical profession. If we may believe the records these domestic events were not few.[1]' 'The child was baptized where it was born and the members of the company were godparents or witnesses.'

There is an ancient tradition to the effect that when Scarron wrote his *Roman comique* he had Molière's troupe in mind. The very place and the exact time of the meeting between the great dramatist and the famous satirist have been indicated. The tradition enjoyed a long life, but has no standing at the present day. Scarron hardly needed a particular group of models

[1] Les comédiennes de la troupe étaient d'une singulière fécondité. — Moland.

from which to paint his realistic canvas; nor was Molière's the only company of itinerant players to be met with in the Seventeenth Century. It is thought that when Scarron was about composing his study of provincial Bohemia the troupe in which our interest centres was not fully organized, or at least that it had not acquired reputation sufficient to make it the object of satire. Moreover Scarron's picture is too broad. The manners of the time were easy, theatrical manners included. Le Breton says that the arrival in a town of a band of strolling players was a signal to the inhabitants to look out for their poultry-yards. None the less it is an unjustifiable exaggeration when one proposes to identify Molière and his

companies with a vagabond troupe such as Scarron has described. Even if Molière was not always — as Moland insists that he was — allied with la haute société of his time, he was as far as possible removed from the other extreme. The pupil of Gassendi may be imagined arriving in a town of South France 'with one foot shod and the other bare' and accompanied by a troupe only a little better clad than Falstaff's regiment; but this picture can only be evoked by the aid of an unbridled imagination.

After turning over an infinite number of dry parchments, and after weighing obscure references with a care only equalled by that of a goldsmith in handling precious metals, the scholars have determined with reasonable accu-

racy the course taken by Molière and his people.

In 1647 he is believed to have visited Toulouse, Albi, and Carcassonne. In April of the following year he was certainly at Nantes, for his name, disguised as 'Morlierre,' is found on the register of the Hôtel de Ville. He is described as 'one of the comedians of the troupe of St. Dufresne.' In 1649 he again visited Toulouse, going thence to Montpellier and Narbonne. In February, 1650, he was at Agen and in December at Pézenas during the session of the Estates. In 1651 his troupe gave performances at Vienne, and in 1652 at Carcassonne.

Beginning with the year 1652 Lyon was the headquarters of the company.

Molière and his people would make excursions to the surrounding towns and villages. These trips were sometimes of long duration, lasting perhaps a half year. For example, in 1653 Molière went from Lyon to Pézenas and remained during the entire session of the Estates, that is, from March 17 to June 1. In the latter part of the same year he was at la Grange-des-Prés. He returned to Montpellier in December, 1654. After a long stay in Lyon he went to Avignon and then back to Pézenas. From Pézenas he went to Narbonne and thence to Béziers. In 1657 he was at Lyon, Dijon, Pézenas, and Avignon. From Avignon he went to Grenoble for the Carnival, thence to Rouen. On the 24th of October, 1658, they reached

Paris, coming directly from Rouen. This in brief is the itinerary of one of the most interesting organizations with which dramatic history has to do.

The troupe had two distinguished patrons. From 1646 to 1652 they were known as the 'comédiens de M. le duc d'Épernon.' The Duc d'Épernon was the governor of Guyenne. From a personal interest in Madeleine Béjart this nobleman was led to take her companions under his powerful protection.

In September or October, 1653, Molière offered his services to the Prince de Conti. The Prince was making merry like a young Sardanapalus, filling the cup of life to the brim during those days of bachelorhood which were left him. His resi-

dence was the Château de la Grange-des-Prés near Pézenas. Hither came Molière and his troupe. When the Prince presided, as representative of the King, at the Estates of Languedoc, this company of players was summoned to furnish entertainment. The documents show how increasingly important Molière's position was becoming.

Larroumet has brought out very clearly in his admirable chapter on Madeleine Béjart the division of responsibilities between the three most important members of the company. Dufresne, 'an old stager,' who had conducted a theatrical troupe in the provinces before now, was the nominal head. Molière was the inspiring and directing force in all that apper-

tained to the actual production of the plays. Mademoiselle Béjart had an eye to the stage settings and costumes, and kept a firm hand on the department of finance. That Molière was a man of affairs admits of no doubt; but Madeleine Béjart, who was so skilful an actress that she could play with equal success the part of soubrette or of a princess of tragedy, was a 'man' of affairs too. Larroumet calls her the steward and 'intendant' of the association. There are many proofs of the 'vigilance and strength' with which her administration was conducted.

With the little city of Pézenas Molière's name is intimately associated. He passed an entire winter here, making excursions from time to

time in the surrounding country. It was rough-and-tumble work, veritable barn-storming. The towns were very small, from one to three thousand inhabitants; and how slender the accommodations must have been either for uncommercial traveller or player may be readily conceived by any one who has tried their hospitality in the broad light of the present civilization. In 1655 the inns were unspeakably wretched. Nor was the pay much better than the fare. It is evident that a village of a few hundred families would not be able to contribute any great sum of money. The company must often have given a performance with the feeling that the sacrifices to be made for art are limitless. Loiseleur adduces as direct proof of the

slenderness of the receipts the fact that the cost of travel was often levied upon the townspeople; they were compelled to furnish horses and wagons to convey the actors and their luggage from one town to the next. We often hear of soldiers being quartered upon a community; it is something new to hear of a theatrical troupe being billeted on its audiences.

A requisition of this kind would need to be made at the instance of some powerful nobleman like the Prince de Conti; for the Prince was famed for his 'cheerful prodigality with other people's money.'

The theatrical accommodations were of the most primitive sort, and varied in poorness with the character and size of the individual towns. A

play-house especially constructed and equipped with theatrical appliances was almost unknown. Even in Paris, the 'Illustre Théâtre' had played in a tennis-court; to be sure, these courts were supplied with a stage in cases where the owner could depend upon a tolerably regular demand for such a thing. Happy were the wandering tragedians of the provinces if they could find a 'jeu de paume' or a riding-school which might readily be improvised into a theatre. In the smaller places they had to be content with a barn lighted with lanterns. In such a theatre the hero of tragedy might at any moment find his periods punctuated by 'the braying of an ass or the bellowing of a bull.'

Rigal[1] has shown what and how many were the tribulations of wandering theatrical companies in the early Seventeenth Century. His chapter refers to a time just before the classic period. Not all the sources of discomfort had been removed when Molière was touring the south of France. Sometimes the Church set herself against the strollers who made their appearance at an inopportune time; the priests went so far as to threaten to discontinue Lenten services unless the players took their departure. The death of a distinguished man would keep the public from a performance. Not infrequently the authorities refused a license, pleading 'hard times'

[1] Eugène Rigal: *Le Théâtre Français*, pp. 8–26.

and urging the necessity of protecting the people from temptation. Or the license was granted provided the company would agree to play its best piece for the benefit of the local hospital. But the worst misfortune of all, says Rigal, was the meeting of two theatrical troupes in the same town. This occasionally happened in spite of their precautions.

At Pézenas was situated the shop of the barber Gély, whose name is often linked with Molière's. A barber-shop filled a more important function in the Seventeenth Century than in the Twentieth. It was a centre for news, for political discussion, for gossip. It was a sort of club, open to all, a place where one might pleasantly beguile many a moment on the plea

of waiting one's turn. The barber himself was a privileged person, oftentimes clever, at all events sure to be filled with modern instances if not with wise saws. Molière, during his long stay in Pézenas, used to go with great regularity to Gély's shop and watch the queer characters who congregated there, hear their talk, take mental note of their absurdities and whims. Like 'Democritus junior' he made himself for the moment 'a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts.' The ancient armchair in which he used to sit is still in existence. Its authenticity seems to be unusually well established. Whatever form of scepticism may seize Pézenas, in common with the rest of the world, the

inhabitants at least never lose their faith in the genuineness of the 'fauteuil de Molière.'

In 1655 (some biographers put the date two years earlier) Molière made his beginning as a dramatic author with *l'Étourdi*, a comedy of intrigue in the Italian style, an imitation in part of the *Innavertito* of Barbieri. It has the merit of originality, not because of the ingenious construction but because of the beauty of the style. Victor Hugo, always magnificent in denunciation or in praise, declared that *l'Étourdi* was the best written of all Molière's comedies. Not every critic is prepared to go to this extreme of eulogy. Few will dissent from the opinion that these earlier comedies of Molière, such as *l'Étourdi*, represent

perfectly the genius of the French language.

Molière's second comedy, *le Dépit amoureux*, was given at Béziers in 1656. The troupe had been summoned there at a meeting of the Estates, and this play was one of the novelties with which that honorable body was entertained. Like its predecessor, the *Dépit amoureux* is taken from the Italian. The *Interresse* of Secchi furnished many of the motives. Mesnard believes that the piece was composed rapidly, and perhaps without other intention at first than to give a French rendering of an Italian play. But the design grew under Molière's hands, and the result was a play too original to admit of being classed as a mere transcription. It will be remem-

bered perhaps that when the Comédie-Française celebrated Molière's birthday during the siege of Paris in 1871, the director selected the *Dépit amoureux* as one of two plays to be performed on that occasion. An immense audience gathered to do honor to the national poet. The sparkle and gaiety of the piece were rendered more striking by the grim accompaniments of war. Cannon muttered and roared in the distance, and shells were bursting in the streets.

L'Étourdi and the *Dépit amoureux* were certainly written and for the first time produced during the latter part of Molière's provincial wanderings. It is even possible that a more brilliant work than either of these should be referred to the same period.

If, as Grimarest affirms, the *Précieuses ridicules* was also produced in the provinces long before its famous début at Paris, the fact is one of high interest. Nothing would be more reasonable than to suppose that Molière found a motive for his lively satire in the ridiculous antics of the country précieuses. The disease of preciosity had excited Chapelle's mirth. 'Molière was quite as capable as Chapelle of making observations upon the strange malady.'

III

MOLIÈRE'S thoughts must often have turned towards his native place during these years of work and travel. After all, he was a Parisian; and what true Parisian looks upon time spent in the provinces as other than time wasted? He may grant, perhaps, that it is good for him to undergo the discipline of an enforced absence from the beloved city; it sharpens the power of appreciation as fasting whets the appetite. None

the less will he insist that it cannot be called living.

Such day-dreaming as Molière may have indulged in was probably not of the sentimental type. The busy life of an actor-manager afforded but a minimum of time for idle reverie or nostalgia. He thought of Paris, but he thought of it as a general planning a campaign thinks of some point of strategical importance. 'Here,' he says to himself, 'the question at issue will be decided.' Every month of work in the provinces fitted this troupe of strollers a little better for the test to which they were presently to be put. It could not be otherwise with a man like Molière at the head. Molière had a conscience in respect to his art. He knew that the duty lay upon him and

his players of giving the best that was in their power, whether the audience was large or small, distinguished or common. Impelled by such a motive and guided by such a leader, this band of comedians steadily grew in force and skill amid conditions which others might have accounted hard or even antagonistic.

In the summer of 1658 Molière made several visits to Paris. His object was to secure that high patronage without which launching an unknown dramatic company upon the sea of Parisian life were a useless and heart-breaking venture. Through his old protector, the Prince de Conti, he was recommended to Monsieur, the King's brother, and by him presented to the King. On the 24th of October the

troupe made its first appearance before the royal family in the 'salle des gardes' of the old Louvre, which had been fitted up as a theatre for this occasion. The play was Corneille's tragedy of *Nicomède*. At its close Molière came forward. Apologizing in the name of his company for their rashness in attempting to entertain the distinguished audience with a type of performance in which the King's own players so greatly excelled, — an allusion to the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne who were present, — he begged that they might be allowed to offer 'one of those little divertisements' through which they had given some pleasure and acquired some repute in the provinces. Permission being granted, the lively farce of the

Docteur amoureux was at once played. It is said that shouts of laughter were raised by Molière's irresistible impersonation of the chief character.

Having proved itself worthy of the charge the company received the coveted title of 'Troupe de Monsieur, frère unique du roi.' Besides the honor shared in common with his fellows, each player was granted a pension of three hundred livres. The reward was less splendid than it seemed. A pension in the Seventeenth Century was a peculiar thing, as the Abbé Fabre has so amusingly shown. It was granted with a smile, paid in part and that grudgingly, too often not paid at all. Those were the days when an indigent man of letters could say to an almost equally indigent actor:

'What, have you a pension? I, too, have one. Let us condole with each other.'

The new dramatic favorites were installed in the 'Salle du Petit-Bourbon,' where they played every other day, alternating with the Italian comedians. The head of the latter troupe was the famous Scaramouche. Molière's company included at this time the following men: Joseph and Louis Béjart, Duparc, Dufresne, and DeBrie. The actresses were the Demoiselles Madeleine Béjart, Duparc, DeBrie, and Hervé (Geneviève Béjart). Three of these women were noted for their beauty; all were more or less human in a willingness to find occasion for professional and personal jealousy.

In November and December of this

same year Molière produced the two comedies which had been so warmly received in Lyon and Montpellier, namely *l'Étourdi* and the *Dépit amoureux;* their success at the Petit-Bourbon was no less complete than it had been in the provincial towns. Molière was now on the eve of a triumph much greater than could be hoped for through the inadequate resources of the Italian comedy of intrigue. He was to begin that incomparable series of studies in contemporary manners, that brilliant and flashing group of satires on contemporary foibles, upon which his fame chiefly rests. The Molière of the *Dépit amoureux* or of *l'Étourdi* was merely a skilful craftsman in a type of work no longer new, and which could be lifted

to no higher level than that upon which it had been placed long before his time. The Molière of the *Précieuses ridicules* was original, a creator.

This sparkling comedy was first played on the 18th of November, 1659. The title alone was sufficient to attract the universal attention of play-goers. Everybody knew what a précieuse was, and many a man had already fitted Molière's adjective to some individual précieuse whom he liked least. It was for Molière himself with his gaiety, his daring, his flashing dialogue, his overflowing good humor, to make the word 'précieuse' and the word 'ridicule' so inseparable that it has taken years of study and many hundred pages of critical writing to convince the world that a

précieuse would be anything but absurd.

That Molière intended to satirize the Hôtel de Rambouillet and its famous mistress is altogether unlikely. A lovable and gracious lady now past sixty years of age, a woman of irreproachable character and noblest ancestry, a loyal wife and a devoted mother, a generous hostess whose drawing-rooms had been for thirty-five years the centre of the most refined society of the age — such a woman now in her widowhood and burdened by many other sorrows neither is nor can be made an object of raillery and satire. To suppose Molière capable of such lack of taste and brutality as would be evinced by his singling out the Marquise and holding her up to public

laughter is to do him injustice. In depicting Madelon and Cathos dividing their time between washes and cosmetics, madrigals and the 'Carte de Tendre,' and ignorant of the world to the point of not knowing the difference between a valet and a gentleman so long as the valet was disguised in the master's clothes, Molière was manifestly laughing at the foolish women in the outermost rim of polite society whose only hope of distinction lay in aping the manners and talk of great ladies. Such women had not even the merit of being first-hand imitations. They were the copies of copies, the distorted reflections of other reflections.

The great days of the Hôtel de Rambouillet began about 1630, when

Molière was a lad of eight. This period of social splendor and pre-eminence continued at the outside about twenty years; some scholars make it a little less, putting the close at the time of Voiture's death, 1648. When Corneille, the most popular dramatic poet of the hour, famous for his tragedies of the *Cid*, *Horace*, and *Cinna*, was introduced to the mistress of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, about the year 1640, Molière, eighteen years of age, had finished his 'humanities' and was taking lessons in philosophy in company with Chapelle. When the boy-preacher, Bossuet, was presented to the Marquise in 1643 and improvised his famous midnight sermon, Molière, a youth of twenty-one, had had a variety of experiences. He had been for

some months at Narbonne in attendance upon the king, Louis XIII, in the capacity of presumptive tapissier valet-de-chambre; he had pursued his law-studies at Orléans, and he was on the eve of founding the 'Illustre Théâtre.' After the failure of his first dramatic venture he went to the provinces, and for twelve years saw little of Parisian life save in brief and hurried visits made at long intervals. Therefore he could know nothing of the Hôtel de Rambouillet from first-hand report during the period when the influence of that great house was most potent, and potent chiefly for good. In the provincial towns, however, Molière must have seen many a coquette whose affected manners and whose speech tricked out with the

foolish phrases of third-rate salons and ruelles would serve as a model for Madelon or Cathos of the *Précieuses ridicules*.

On the day when this famous comedy was first given 'all Hôtel de Rambouillet was present,' and applauded with an enthusiasm rather difficult to comprehend if it regarded the satire as directly applicable to itself. There was no spectator of taste and judgment to whom the winsome little piece was not a revelation of new resources in dramatic art. The air of reality given to the whole performance made people feel as if they were beholding an actual scene from contemporary life. Here was something fresh, spontaneous, irresistible. Grimarest relates that one day at a per-

formance of the *Précieuses ridicules*, an old man in the parterre cried out, 'Courage, courage, Molière, voila la bonne comédie!' Destructive criticism has set aside most of the picturesque stories collected by Molière's first biographer. But this one might easily be true. The incident is not out of reason, and the old man's commendation neither extravagant nor extravagantly expressed. Here was indeed the true type of comedy for which the public had been waiting so long. An attempt on the part of some outraged 'alcoviste' to interdict the play only served to inflame public curiosity. When it was presented again after its brief suspension the interest was so great that the price of

admission was doubled; this rarely happened at the Petit-Bourbon.

Not unnaturally Molière was charged with plagiarism; the world often finds it difficult or impossible to believe that the man most likely to have written a certain thing was the man who really wrote it. He was accused of having robbed the Abbé de Pure. The intellectual riches of the Abbé de Pure were not so abundant that he could be robbed without serious inconvenience to himself, a fact less apparent then than now. And so the tale was gravely told of how the *Précieuses ridicules* was taken from a piece of de Pure's, written in Italian and played in 1656. Molière himself seems not to have thought the ridiculous charge worth the trouble

of a denial. The true answer to such an accusation consists in writing yet another play, as good or better, and another after that. It was easy to say that Molière stole the idea of the *Précieuses ridicules*, but what was to be done about *l'École des Maris*, the *Fâcheux*, and *l'École des Femmes?* The most gifted robber, if he be really a robber, must be caught at last.

It was thought a backward step when Molière, after marking out a new path for himself, returned to the Italian comedy of intrigue and wrote *Sganarelle, ou le Cocu imaginaire* (1660). Taschereau criticises the chief personage of this play as too unreal to interest, and too often a buffoon to admit of his being strictly a comic character. The freshness and gaiety

of the piece attracted a crowd of spectators day after day for more than forty days. Even if Molière lost ground with the finer judges of dramatic literature, he at least held his own with the play-going public. They were thoroughly amused, and in no mood to welcome *Don Garcie de Navarre, ou le Prince jaloux*, a comédie héroïque, which was produced at the Palais-Royal in February, 1661.

Don Garcie is classed among the few failures of this great dramatist. The play has been abused beyond reason. Molière later incorporated some of its best passages in the *Misanthrope*, 'not from a motive of economy, but because he knew they were worthy of being preserved.' He did not yield to the popular verdict

without a struggle. *Don Garcie* was played before the King in 1662, and a year afterwards before the Prince de Condé, then again before the King. Hoping the public would revise its opinion after it had time to reflect upon the matter, the author once more put the piece upon the boards at the Palais-Royal. This time the verdict was unmistakable, so unmistakable that the play was not even printed until after Molière's death.

In June, 1661, Molière reasserted his claim to originality by the production of the famous *École des Maris*, and in August of the same year the court comedy *Les Fâcheux* was played at the fêtes which Fouquet gave at his country-seat of Vaux in honor of Louis XIV. In the first

of these two studies of contemporary manners Molière returns to the type of comedy in which he had once before shown himself an absolute master. The *École des Maris* is original in precisely the way in which the *Précieuses ridicules* is original. The dramatist borrows an idea from the ancients here and there. Terence in his *Adelphi* had contrasted two types of education, the genial and the severe. But what gives vitality to Molière's piece is taken from the vivid present. The scenes throb with life. The characters appealed at once to every spectator by their human qualities.

Two brothers, Ariste and Sganarelle, have as wards two sisters, Léonor and Isabelle. Each undertakes the care of one of the young girls and brings her

up according to his theory. Ariste, who is genial, open-handed, a man of the world in the best sense of the word, says: 'Give a girl some liberty, she will be none the worse for it.' Sganarelle, who is harsh and suspicious, says: 'By no means, keep a girl at home, and then you know where she is.' Ariste thinks that old as he is his ward will love him none the less for having seen life. Sganarelle thinks that if his ward mends his linen and knits stockings she will be having excitement enough; if she rebels he proposes to take her back to the country to live with the cabbages and turkeys. Sganarelle reaps the natural reward of undue severity. Isabelle says to herself that a man so intolerable as a guardian will be a hundred

times worse as a husband. She is fairly driven to the arms of her lover, Valère. Isabelle's ingenuity in making the egoistic guardian act as a go-between, carry letters, repeat messages, and in all possible ways further Valère's suit, is intensely comic.

The construction of the *École des Maris* is ingenious; on the other hand *les Fâcheux* has almost no plot whatever.

An amiable marquis, Éraste, anxious for a meeting with his inamorata, is beset by bores, each of whom detains him on some ridiculous pretext. His efforts to escape furnish the audience no end of merriment. Every one who witnesses the play recalls his own experience in running into all the people whom at a given moment he

least cares to meet. Éraste meets Lisandre, who is music-mad, and insists on humming over a tune he has just composed, and pacing the steps of a dance to accompany it. Once rid of this bore Éraste encounters Alcandre, who wants his services as second in a duel. Éraste has his doubts about duelling, and makes his escape only to fall into the clutches of Alcippe, who has had wonderful ill luck at a game of piquet and must needs go into all the details. Two other bores insist that Éraste settle a dispute for them. Another desires to read a petition he has drawn up urging an orthographical reform in sign-boards over tavern doors. The next bore wants to make Éraste's fortune for him, not through copper stocks, but by an invention

which will so please the King that inventor and intermediary must profit beyond the dreams of avarice.

The play is in three acts and the 'fâcheux' are ten in number. With characteristic audacity Molière explained to his public that he could easily have made a five act play, so many bores are there both at court and in the city. The value of the piece for readers of to-day is in the fidelity of the character painting. Éraste's first monologue, in which the whole race of bores is anathematized, gives one a better idea of the manners of the time than could be got by reading a dozen historical essays.

The *Fâcheux* is often cited as an illustration of Molière's power of rapid invention. Only fifteen days elapsed

between the giving of the commission and the production of the play. In that brief time the piece was conceived, written, learned, and put into rehearsal. Other playwrights have worked with equal rapidity, but an examination of their product shows the marks of haste rather than of speed. If Moland is to be believed, the *Fâcheux* is quite free from the class of faults usually thought to be involved in hurried composition. Faults of this sort would be apparent in the style. In this case 'neither precision nor clarity is wanting.' On the other hand, it is utterly absurd to assume that Molière had not in mind some latent idea which to be brought out needed but an occasion, like that afforded by the fêtes at Vaux. He

may even have had a 'first sketch' in his portfolio. According to de Vizé the portfolio contained more materials than the distinguished comedian could use. 'Molière received from people of quality memoranda of which they begged him to avail himself. One evening after the play,' says de Vizé, 'I saw him in great embarrassment searching everywhere for tablets in order to write down what was said to him by the people of condition who gathered about him.' De Vizé's narrative would lead one to suppose that each of these fine gentlemen had some friend whom he wished to see held up to ridicule by the arch satirist of the day. Finally these memoirs accumulated to such an extent that Molière would have been kept

busy with them all his life had it not occurred to him to put a number of the sketches into one piece. 'He then made the comedy of the *Fâcheux*, the subject of which is as bad as could be imagined.' Indeed, according to de Vizé, the piece does not deserve to be called a play; it is nothing more than 'a series of detached portraits' all taken from these 'memoirs' furnished by representatives of polite society. The critic grants, however, that each character is hit off so admirably, each portrait is so naturally drawn and so finely finished, that Molière deserves great praise.

The most credible point in all this is the willingness and anxiety on the part of the people of quality to hold one another up to ridicule. Even

Louis himself did not fail to add his quota by calling Molière's attention to M. de Soyecourt the hunter, as an 'original' worthy the satirist's attention. De Soyecourt was very much of a gentleman, but when he began to tell stories of the hunt he was like the Ancient Mariner; he had his will. The listener's attitude may not have been in any sense that of a two years' child; none the less he listened because it was impossible to get away from this 'narrateur impitoyable.' In its original form the *Fâcheux* contained no scene quite comparable to that presenting the encounter with Dorante. Poor Éraste meets bores enough, and many varieties of them, for the number is inexhaustible. After the first performance Louis said to

Molière, indicating de Soyecourt, 'Voila un grand original que tu n'as pas encore copié.' The hint was sufficient. Within twenty-four hours the scene where Dorante buttonholes the unhappy Éraste was written, and at the second performance it was incorporated in the play.

To any one interested in Fouquet's career the comedy of the *Fâcheux* will always have significance apart from its value as dramatic literature. It was almost the last spectacle upon which the eyes of this unhappy victim of a chance turn of Fortune's wheel rested. No mere stage pageant can compare in splendor with the 'chronicle-history' of the grandeur and fall of Nicholas Fouquet. It is said that before the King accepted his hospi-

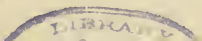
tality for the fêtes at Vaux, the surintendant's ruin had been decreed, and that only the entreaties of the queen-mother prevented an immediate arrest. The King's jealousy because of Fouquet's display of wealth and power was alone sufficient to bring about his downfall. Yet it may be doubted whether that sharp note of personal antagonism would have been introduced had not the King learned that Mademoiselle de Vallière had been singled out for such questionable honors as Fouquet chose to bestow upon beautiful women. When Fouquet discovered that his rival was none other than Louis himself, he had the rash courage to congratulate the girl upon her conquest. Overwhelmed with confusion, she appealed to her

protector. The monarch's anger was great, and on September 5 the powerful minister of finance was placed under arrest.

These events followed so hard one upon another that it is believed Molière was compelled to forego the no doubt splendid compensation which the minister had promised. And if Molière went unpaid, so must a myriad of less important people who had been summoned to contribute to the splendor of Fouquet's entertainment. A man of the surintendant's position was like a prince. He could not exactly be said to hold lives in the hollow of his hand, yet when he was ruined, misery and want came to hundreds of his dependents and to not a few of his friends.

IV

ON the 26th of December, 1662, the famous play entitled *l'École des Femmes* was produced at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal. With the exception of *Tartuffe*, no work by the great dramatist aroused such irritation and awakened such jealousy. It is difficult fully to understand the grounds of the antagonism. Perhaps old time play-goers took their diversion with a degree of severity unknown to us. A play was an affair of importance in



the second half of the seventeenth century. It seems to have mattered very much what a man like Molière put into his dramas; just as at the present day, when the author of *Adamzad* and the *White Man's Burden* publishes a new poem, the journalistic dovecotes are fluttered for weeks afterward. For whatever else was said of him, Molière was never charged with lack of directness, force, wit, and the power of satire. People heard his latest piece and always found something in it to excite discussion. With his marked personality and strong views, it was inevitable that he should antagonize half of his auditors. With his habit of close observation, his skill in grasping the salient features in individual character, he seemed often to

be descending to personal satire when perhaps he meant nothing of the kind. People insisted upon recognizing themselves. Then they went away to proclaim loudly that they had been abused.

The *École des Femmes* is a continuation of the thesis laid down in the *École des Maris*. It might be called a second part. The same characters do not appear, but the situations and a number of the ideas are repeated with the emphasis laid in new places. Molière puts a most interesting person on the stage, namely, a man of the world who holds the doctrine that the only way to get a satisfactory wife is to train one for one's self. Such a character must be of necessity both amusing and pathetic. Arnolphe's

theory of how a young woman should be educated is very simple. Let her be brought up in such ignorance of the ways of the world that she won't know enough to go wrong. Make a fool of her if necessary; what matter, so one preserve one's own good name! Arnolphe, who, it must be remembered, is a monomaniac on the question suggested by the 'word of fear,'[1] never loses an opportunity to rail at married men for their complaisance, or their stupidity. But he proposes to profit by their misfortunes. He takes the beautiful Agnés from her peasant mother, immures her within four walls, puts trusty servants in charge, and, at frequent intervals,

[1] The song in *Love's Labor's Lost*, Act V, scene 2.

visits her under an assumed name for the purpose of instructing her in the duties of wifely obedience. Few scenes are more amusing than that in which Arnolphe explains to his young protégée how great an honor he will confer in making her his wife; nay, more than that, how godlike is the condescension of any man in stooping to marry a mere woman. Agnés accepts this with adorable patience. She is already in love, but not with her protector. Horace, the son of Arnolphe's friend Oronte, has seen this naïve beauty and become enamoured of her. His ardent wooing and the girl's demure response are in Molière's most charming vein. Unconscious that Arnolphe is the guardian of Agnés, Horace tells him the

whole story, thus putting him on his guard. The scenes in which the horrified, middle-aged egoist listens against his will to the young man's enthusiastic outpourings, are strikingly vivacious and humorous. It is of course impossible to keep the lovers apart. Agnés follows Horace as trustfully as the Princess in the *Day-Dream*. And then, perfectly to meet that prejudice against an alliance between people of breeding and the lower classes, Agnés is found to be no peasant's daughter, but a lady herself, by birth as well as by instinct. The *École des Femmes* appeared just ten months after Molière's marriage with young Armande Béjart.

The critics have read into the play not a few autobiographical facts.

They have reason to do so, for the parallel between the history of this pair and that of Molière and Armande is close at times. The great comedian was not an Arnolphe, and the brilliant, fascinating little actress with eyes smaller than eyes should be to be beautiful, and a mouth that was a trifle large, though it could not have been more seductive, — this piquant being, an embodiment of bewildering charm and wayward grace, was not in any sense the original of Agnés. Yet the relation between Arnolphe and Agnés suggests one phase of the relation between the poet and his young wife. It is possible that Molière may have reflected more times than once, as he watched the course of his own passion, how foolish in general is the

man of forty who imagines he can win and hold the love of an eighteen-year-old girl.

The attacks upon the *École des Femmes* prompted its author to make a counter attack in the *Critique de l'École des Femmes.* He brings upon the stage a group of people discussing his own play. A précieuse prude and a foolish marquis are offended because of the piece, the one by its grossness, the other by its lack of wit. The marquis needs no further proof of the soundness of his position than the fact that the parterre goes into shouts of laughter over the performance. How can that fail to be bad which amuses the parterre? Uranie, Élise, and Dorante defend the author, and ridicule the prevailing craze for stilted lan-

guage and affected niceness. They are for good sense, and they incline to the belief that plain people have more of this commodity than by right belongs to them, since marquises and précieuses are so conspicuously lacking in it.

The wit is at times superlatively mordant. One must marvel at Molière's courage. Yet, on the other hand, audiences are pretty evenly balanced, and there is a 'bottom of good sense' in human nature which makes the applause come at the right point. An audience as an audience is morally sound, whatever it may be taken individual by individual. Molière, to be sure, had the King on his side; and Molière with Louis XIV was a majority. But even then, there remains

a large residuum of courage, for which the dramatist must have credit. Louis could not spend his time protecting his favorite at every point, and there were men of sufficient power in France to make Molière uncomfortable. Moreover, kings are notoriously fickle, and if the monarch's fancy should veer to another quarter, the quondam favorite might be regarded as in a worse case than before. Molière seems not to have disturbed himself with idle speculations. He had his work to do, his mission as a satirist to fulfil, and he went about the task with a minimum of anxiety for immediate or ultimate consequences.

The merry war by no means came to an end with the production of the *Critique*. Having received insulting

treatment at the hands of a certain nobleman who thought he had been attacked in the play, Molière appealed to the King. The monarch gave the poet permission to lampoon his enemies to the top of his bent. Molière made use of the privilege 'in a manner truly Aristophanic.' The *Impromptu de Versailles* was a last and brilliant assault in this particular campaign against précieuses, foppish marquises, and the rival performers of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. As a document the *Impromptu* is of inestimable value. Molière brings all his people upon the stage, each in his own person. We enjoy the always coveted privilege of 'going behind the scenes.' We see the great actor-manager surrounded by his company. Nor does

he spare them in the general distribution of caustic criticism. 'Ah! les étranges animaux à conduire que des comédiens!' he exclaims.

In 1664 he produced *le Mariage forcé*, *la Princesse d'Élide*, and the first three acts of *Tartuffe*. The *Mariage forcé*, a comédie-ballet, is one of the many pieces which Molière wrote less to please himself than to please the King. 'By ministering to the monarch's passion for fêtes and spectacles, the poet obtained for himself the privilege of writing *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope*.' Critics have seen fit to lament that Molière should have been compelled to waste, upon ballets and farces, precious time and still more precious powers, which might otherwise have been given to the 'haute

comédie.' The attitude of the critics is not surprising. It is idle, however, to worry because men who have worked successfully in a certain environment did not have more time and more favorable circumstances. The implication is that under other conditions the geniuses would have produced in larger measure that type of literature which critics justly admire. Such a result is by no means certain. A deal of creative energy is bound to be wasted in one way or another. Who knows whether the repression did not ultimately act as a stimulating force or motive, and whether Molière did not work with greater energy at *Tartuffe*, the *Misanthrope*, and the *Femmes savantes* because he was compelled to write ballets in which Louis

could display the grace of his manner and the splendor of his costume.

The young King was now twenty-six, and eager for pleasure. The fashionable world took immense delight in the ballet. The entertainment differed much from the type of performance usually associated with the word at the present time. The dances were for the most part stately, and in court ballets a high decorum reigned. 'Society' not only witnessed these spectacles but took part in them. For example, when *le Mariage forcé* was given, Louis himself appeared 'in the costume of an Egyptian.' There were eight 'entrées de ballet.' Among the dancers were many representatives of the nobility. This performance at the court in January was 'only a prelude

to the brilliant follies' which were to take place at Versailles in May of that same year.

Certain ideas and situations in the *Mariage forcé* appear to have been suggested to Molière by his study of Rabelais. The piece is a commentary on that state of affairs which will permit a young girl to welcome marriage with a man who, besides being a brutal sensualist, is enough older than herself to be her father, simply because marriage means freedom. The play has a cynical quality by no means agreeable, though it may be that this tones down and is partially lost in the broad comedy effects when the play is played. There are some liberties of expression which drive the critics into apologizing for Molière. English

critics need hardly feel called upon to attack the Frenchman for a lack of delicacy if they stopped to reflect that Molière was contemporary of the respectable John Dryden. It would be difficult to find anything to match for grossness certain passages in the *Wild Gallant* and the *Spanish Friar*.

The *Princesse d'Élide* was composed for the fêtes which were held at Versailles in May, 1664. Ostensibly given in honor of the two queens, Anne of Austria and Marie-Thérèse, they were really intended for the gratification of Mademoiselle de La Vallière. The plan of the celebration was drawn up by the Duc de Saint-Aignan, who took his idea from Ariosto. In the sixth and seventh cantos of the *Orlando furioso* is the story of

Roger's visit to Alcine in the enchanted isle. So the entertainments during the first three days of the festival were known as the *Plaisirs de l'Ile enchantée.* One of these days was given to Molière's *Princesse d'Élide.* The piece was composed in great haste, as may be seen from the fact that it begins in verse and ends in prose. Molière had not time to complete it according to his original plan. The story was taken from the Spanish dramatist, Moreto.

In the festivities and ceremonies which were held out of doors, the King played the part of Roger. The description of the triumphal entry reads like the programme of the grand march around the arena of some 'stupendous and unparalleled

aggregation' of wonders belonging to a three-ring circus. There were Barnums in those days. It is easy to laugh at this childish passion for color, pomp, and display; but the affair was too important to be dismissed with a laugh. The magnificence was real. The costumes were the most beautiful and costly that could be devised by unlimited expenditure of money and inventive power. The actors in the pageant were a real king, real queens, real noblemen, real ladies of quality. The congratulatory poems and the plays were the work of real poets, a Benserade and a Molière. A 'float,' as it would be called now, represented Apollo seated on a throne with the Four Ages at his feet. On either side

of his chariot marched the Twelve Hours and the Signs of the Zodiac, costumed 'as the poets represent them.' After the recitatives the 'course de bague' took place. This was the riding with lance for the ring, a form of amusement which displayed much of the old time spirit of the tournament with a minimum of danger. A collation was served at night by the light of flambeaux, and the Signs of the Zodiac and the Hours danced 'one of the most beautiful entrées de ballet ever seen.'

On the second day, Molière's comédie galante, *la Princesse d'Élide*, was presented. The author played the part of Moron. Armande Béjart won such a triumph in the rôle of the princess that her pretty head was turned

by it, so tradition says. The pleasures of the enchanted isle lasted for a week. Molière was the favorite entertainer. His *Fâcheux* was played on the evening of the fifth day. On the sixth, the first three acts of *Tartuffe* were given, at the King's request; and on the seventh day there was a performance of *le Mariage forcé*.

The biographers of Molière account the moment of the production of *Tartuffe* as 'one of the most celebrated dates in the annals of our dramatic literature.' The poet had never been without courage, but in *Tartuffe*, daring was carried to the point of bravado. It may be said that the antagonism aroused by this piece found expression in one way or another from that moment up to the day of Mo-

lière's death and for many years after his death.

Without doubt a large part of the hostility to *Tartuffe* was not in the least excited by the moral aspect of the question. It was a play by Molière, and that was enough. Any play of his would have met with the same reception. His professed enemies were predisposed to frown upon anything he might do. The student of biography is under no obligation to account for those antagonisms which appear to be stirred up by men of marked individuality for no other reason than the sufficient one that dulness is envious of genius.

Two sorts of enemies were real and powerful. The first class consisted of the Tartuffes themselves — men who

make a cloak of religion to hide their true nature. When Molière tore away the sanctimonious mask behind which was concealed a vicious face, he aroused all hypocrites to the pitch of malignant anger. They lifted up their voices and cried 'Blasphemer!' accusing Molière of injuring the cause of religion. The poet was singled out for opprobrium such as the extreme Puritans heaped upon Christopher Marlowe. The instances are not parallel, but the abuse was very like. There was an earnest cry in Molière's case for some one in authority who should 'put a hook into the nostrils of this barking dog.'

The lamentations of the Tartuffes were mingled with, and not always to be distinguished from, the sincere ex-

pressions of regret which fell from the lips of those who held the view that religion must never be involved in a jest, even when the jest was directed towards spurious devotionalists. The danger was too great. Who was able to distinguish? Who could say with infallible accuracy which was the false and which the true? After all, might not the man who seemed a hypocrite be more nearly genuine than we know? The marks which distinguish spurious from true devotion are not easily found in every case. The attitude of these critics is perfectly understood when we bear in mind the case of Swift and the *Tale of a Tub*. Swift's satire was directed against Romanists and Presbyterians in behalf of the Established Church. Devout churchmen,

however, felt that the cause of religion as a whole was made ridiculous, that such scandalous freedom did more harm than good. And in the same spirit critics of Molière, who were animated by no particular hostility toward the man, asked themselves whether the attack upon false devotion was not likely to be interpreted as a satire upon all religious profession. They believed that it was so interpreted, and hence their opposition.

Then began that long struggle for the removal of the interdiction. The play could not be given to the public, but apparently no other ban was laid upon it. Molière gave readings of *Tartuffe* to select audiences. The conflict of opinion was so violent that curiosity was very great; an oppor-

tunity to hear the author read his own play was eagerly sought for. 'It was the most attractive sort of entertainment that could be devised for people of quality.'

The dispute over *Tartuffe* was inflamed by the great contemporary theological quarrel. It was said that in one of the scenes the author made mock of the Jesuits. The Jesuits on their part were very sure that Molière had the Jansenists in mind; *Tartuffe* was in its way a reply to the *Provincial Letters*. All, however, managed to be offended alike. The case of *Tartuffe* was not unlike that of the valetudinarian in the play quoted by Erasmus; one physician affirmed, another denied, yet another thought the matter should be taken under consid-

eration, but all agreed that the patient was in a very bad way.

In addition to the readings, there were private performances of *Tartuffe*. The King visited his brother at Villers-Cotterets, the last week of September, 1664, when three acts of *Tartuffe* were played for his diversion. One month later, the entire comedy was given at the château of the Prince de Condé. The suppression, therefore, was only partial, and was perhaps intended to be no more. The monarch's frown was official rather than actual. That Louis himself could not fully understand the grounds of the public disapproval would seem to be clear from the following anecdote. The King asked a certain 'great prince' (probably Condé), why it

was that the zealots who were shocked by *Tartuffe* made no outcry over the play of *Scaramouche ermite*. The great prince is said to have replied somewhat to this effect: 'The reason is that the comedy of Scaramouch merely ridicules heaven and religion, about which these gentlemen care nothing; but Molière's comedy ridicules the zealots themselves, and that they cannot endure.'

One of the principal attacks upon Molière was made by a doctor in theology, Pierre Roulès, curé of Saint-Barthélemy. It was a volume devoted to fulsome panegyric of the King, and bearing the title *Le Roi glorieux au monde ou Loüis XIV le plus glorieux de tous les rois du monde*. The brief extract given by Moland

illustrates the type of flattery which sycophants could give and monarchs could stomach two hundred and forty years since. Some of the expressions used are positively blasphemous. The curé says that if ever a king had glory on this earth and if ever the earth had a glorious king, 'without flattery,' Louis is the man. God never leaves any work imperfect or half finished. He makes no sketches or crayons, only chefs d'œuvres. And among his masterpieces Louis XIV is one of the most notable. In plain terms, according to Pierre Roulès, Louis is 'a terrestrial god and a divine man, without a precedent and without a peer.'

We do not know how great a sense of humor the curé of Saint-Barthélemy had, but he could not have had much,

if he thought *Tartuffe* was impious and his own panegyric was not.

While the ostensible motive of Roulès's book was praise of the monarch, the real motive was abuse of Molière. The priest speaks in no uncertain terms, whether he utters praise or blame. He describes Molière as 'a demon clad in flesh and dressed as a man, the most outrageous blasphemer and atheist that ever lived,' one who should be punished at the stake as a preliminary to the inevitable fires of hell. It would seem as if such violence might defeat its own end. According to Larroumet, the King gave Roulès to understand that his zeal was without discretion.

The poet remitted no effort to have the interdiction raised. The ex-

periment was tried of changing the title of the play, softening the expressions which gave most offence, and costuming the chief character in a way less likely to reflect upon those who, from religious scruples, affected austerity in dress. The interdict lasted five years; not until 1669 was *Tartuffe* given the freedom of the public stage.

Let us recall one or two of the striking incidents in this celebrated play. Tartuffe does not appear until the second scene of the third act; but not a word is spoken up to the moment he comes upon the stage that does not define his character with utmost nicety. We can see the insinuating, unctuous hypocrite, whose presence is a menace to all healthy, reasonable delight, as it is a menace to the spirit

of true devotion. Tartuffe has won the heart of the master of the house, and thereby seems to have won all; for the phrase 'head of the house' was not an idle and meaningless one in those days; if Orgon wills that his daughter shall break her troth with Valère and marry Tartuffe, there seems to be no help for it. That Mariane is unwilling only makes matters worse. The exalted passion which Orgon has conceived for the character of Tartuffe is intensified by the hostility of the rest of the family. Orgon, we must remember, is defending not his guest alone, or the cause of religion; he is also working against that invidious spirit of rebellion which would subvert his authority.

One cannot sufficiently admire the

skill of the great dramatist in placing Tartuffe's entrance with his famous 'serrez ma haire avec ma discipline' so close to the scene with Elmire. Tartuffe takes advantage of the hospitality he enjoys to make love to Orgon's young and pretty wife. Damis, Orgon's son, overhears the loathsome proposals and tells his father in Tartuffe's presence of the dishonor that has been done him. But the father is so besotted with the hypocrite that he will not credit the story. The more Damis protests, the more is Orgon strengthened in the conviction that a shameful plot is on foot to blast the reputation of a good man — doubly shameful because his own son is chief among the conspirators. The testimony of Elmire does not move him;

she is mistaken, no doubt; she has not heard aright; the virtuous are so apt to be misunderstood. In short, Tartuffe is a saint. How can one be with him and not know it? His mere presence irradiates virtue. After all, it is a trick on the part of Damis to humiliate Tartuffe.

A man infatuated to this degree becomes unnatural. Orgon disinherits his son and makes over his property to Tartuffe. He even abases himself in the hypocrite's presence, falling on his knees before him, almost worshipping the man whom he conceives to be incarnate goodness. When Elmire, making one supreme effort to persuade her husband of Tartuffe's treachery, asks him what he would say, could he hear the damnable words with his own

ears, Orgon replies that he would say — nothing, for the thing is an impossibility.

Though slow to be convinced, Orgon is convinced at last. Having sent for Tartuffe, Elmire conceals her husband beneath the table and compels him to learn from the hypocrite's own lips the extent of his depravity. Entrapped, as he is, Tartuffe can do no better than show himself a downright villain and bring a charge of treason against the friend who has lifted him from poverty and overwhelmed him with benefits. But the great prince who can read all hearts is not misled by the baseness of a hypocrite. Tartuffe is carried to prison, and the house of Orgon is once more at peace.

Objection is frequently made that

the dénouement of *Tartuffe* is weak and conventional. But it has long since become a commonplace of criticism that Molière is often conventional and never altogether happy in his dénouements.

While waiting for the removal of the interdict Molière produced eight plays, of which the most notable were *Don Juan ou le Festin de Pierre* and *le Misanthrope*. The *Festin de Pierre* was a bold advertisement to Molière's enemies that he had no thought of abandoning his position. It was a fresh challenge to the hostile party to do their worst.

The classic Spanish play of Don Juan, from which all the others derive, was the work of Tirso de Molina. The legend passed into Italy and

France. At least two versions were played in Paris in Molière's time. The romantic and supernatural elements of the legend had always fascinated the popular imagination. The story is briefly this. Don Juan, the embodiment of exultant atheism and sensuality, kills the aged commander d'Ulloa, whose daughter he had made one of the many victims of his passion. He escapes the vengeance of the law by reason of his birth and influential connections. He then disappears. The story is presently bruited abroad that Don Juan went to the tomb of his victim and there defied and insulted the statue of the commander. Whereupon the statue came to life and hurled the impious wretch into the flames of Hell, which, greedy for their prey, burst

through the yawning stones of the chapel pavement.

The libertine of the Spanish legend becomes in Molière's play a type of the modern French seigneur, powerful, lawless, insolent, a blasphemer; but magnificent in his audacity and wholly incapable of fear. The play is the complement of *Tartuffe*. In the one piece Molière lashes hypocrisy; in the other he assails blatant and high-handed vice. The element of comedy is supplied by Sganarelle, Don Juan's valet. The first of Molière's attacks upon the medical profession occurs in this play. Sganarelle, disguised as a physician, tells his master how he prescribed for the peasants who consulted him; and Don Juan hurls a gibe at the doctors, whose art, he says, is pure grimace. The last

scene of the play, with its superb opportunity for a final struggle before inevitable defeat, seems tame after a reading of the fifth act of Marlowe's *Faustus*. On the other hand, it is possible that a Frenchman might find the *Faustus* bombastic and swollen.

With *l'Amour médecin*, a comédie-ballet in three acts (1665), Molière began in earnest his attacks upon the medical profession. The little sketch, written at the king's command, was composed, put into rehearsal, and produced, within five days. The chief physicians of the court were taken off. It was possible to recognize them by gesture and carriage. One may well doubt whether the actors played the parts in masks made expressly to represent the unhappy doctors.

On June 4, 1666, the great play entitled *le Misanthrope* was presented for the first time. It is Molière's masterpiece. Boileau's judgment upon its merits has been reaffirmed by a multitude of exacting and delicate critics. Shakespeare is not more truly 'the author of *Hamlet*' than is Molière 'the author of *le Misanthrope*.' This is that greater comedy, by virtue of which its author at once takes his rightful place in the first rank of literary creators.

The chief character is a type to be found in all ages and all civilizations, and one of perennial interest. He is a man of the world who despises the world, though he lives in it and plays his part amid its pomp and vanity. He is a pessimist, but that most admirable

specimen of all his despairing kind, a generous pessimist. He knows too well that the time is out of joint. He is not so vain as to think that he was born to set it right. Whatever his obligation may or may not be, it is not for him to acquiesce stupidly in the world's shams and pretences. He has, too, his mission of cursing, and this is a mission not to be underestimated, least of all despised. Happy the world when it finds itself 'abashed' before the 'rude sincerity' of an Alceste.

The *Misanthrope*, like so many of Molière's plays, is an attack upon hypocrisy — in this case 'the petty hypocrisies of the fashionable world.' When the arraignment of society is put into the lips of one who, as in the case of Alceste, is a part of the social

stratum he so condemns, the effect is withering.

It has sometimes been remarked that Alceste's humor is too violent, his rage needlessly brutal, that his hatred for mankind is 'based on a whim, not on reason.' It is important to bear in mind that Alceste is presented to us at a highly critical moment in his history. A man like the 'Misanthrope' may be imagined as having once conformed more or less reluctantly to the manners of his time and his class. To be sure he thinks those manners absurd and the fashionable world utterly insincere, but he makes no protest beyond a biting sarcasm now and then. Gradually the monstrous nature of this artificial life appalls and then embitters him. What

was once only folly now seems wickedness; society is enmeshed in lies. Alceste passes through a sort of crisis. At this juncture to keep silence were to become equally guilty with those whom he condemns. Molière depicts his hero at this moment of supreme psychological interest. Who knows whether Alceste may not in time become philosophical?

A play as thoughtful as the *Misanthrope* is not likely to command a wide hearing. People said at the time that it was a failure; by which, apparently, they meant that it was not received with tempestuous applause on the part of the general public. It was in no sense a failure, though it is plain to see that more people were able to comprehend the fun of *le Médecin malgré lui*

than the deep and passionate quality of the *Misanthrope*.

Without being vulgarly popular, the story of Alceste and Célimène was a marked triumph. For a performance must surely be regarded in the light of a triumph which commands the admiration of discerning critics at the same time that it holds the attention of the play-going public. The vivid interest of the play itself, as a play, was strengthened by a usage which the author of *The Reverberator* holds unspeakably vulgar when applied to fiction. One, at least, of the dramatis personæ in the *Misanthrope* was identified with a man well known in the military and social life of the time. However reprehensible may be the practice of putting well-known living people into fiction

and drama, Molière must be allowed the privilege granted without protest to all writers of his time. The making of pen-portraits had been one of the delights of fashionable society when Molière was a boy. The characters in Mademoiselle de Scudéry's novels not only were, but were intended to be, recognized. If people were shocked by Bussy-Rabutin's *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, it was not because they found themselves described in its pages, but because the descriptions were unflattering, or even outrageously malicious. La Bruyère in his *Characters*, published twenty-two years after the epoch of the *Misanthrope*, painted from life and made no concealment of the fact. In short, the practice was a common one. In this

respect Molière was not an innovator; he made use of a method that was frequently employed, and, so far as we know, not frowned upon. The public, sitting for its portrait, only asked what it insists upon at the present time, namely, that the portrait painter or photographer do his best: in other words, show Nature what she might have done if she had had her wits about her.

Tradition has always declared that the Duc de Montausier was the original of Alceste. Few traditions are better grounded. The likeness was remarked when the play was first produced. Some charitable individuals hastened to the Hôtel de Rambouillet to tell Montausier that Molière had caricatured him. After seeing the

play, the nobleman thought otherwise. Montausier had as few failings, taking into account the weakness of human nature, as the best of men may presume to have. He was not susceptible to vulgar flattery, but he would have been of an austere mould indeed, had he shown himself incapable of being pleased at his identification with Alceste.

Montausier was a conspicuous and wholly attractive figure in the 'great world' of his day. It will be remembered that he married Julie d'Angennes, eldest daughter of the Marquis de Rambouillet. He was governor to Louis XIV during the young king's minority. He was a patron of all good people and of all noble enterprises, whether in statecraft or literature.

Through his instrumentality the famous Delphine edition of the Greek and Latin classics was projected and made. Mademoiselle de Scudéry described Montausier in the *Grand Cyrus*, under the name of Mégabate. According to her analysis he was 'a born enemy to flattery.' Had the continuance of his fame depended upon the novelist's shallow but not ungraceful characterization, he would be forgotten; as Alceste he lives and must continue to live so long as the work of Molière shall endure.

V

MOLIÈRE was not a handsome man, though fulsome panegyric has tried to make him out an Apollo. Of the many so-called 'portraits' only two, according to Émile Perrin, are worthy of serious attention. The poet was below medium height rather than above it. His figure was thick-set and heavy, the legs long and thin. His head was large, the neck short, the nose and mouth of a type which careful people describe as 'generous.'

In many a face the lack of physical charm is fully compensated for by the beauty of the eyes; but Molière's eyes were small and set wide apart. There was need of that 'inner flame,' that undoubted genius, to give to his features the power of fascination which they certainly possessed.

For one whose art was so largely compounded of declamation, gesture, and grimace, Molière was strangely silent and dignified in private life. His friends used to rally him on his self-absorption. He has put a description of himself into the lips of Élise in the *Critique de l'École des femmes*. Élise describes the supper which Climène gave in Molière's honor: how the guests stared at the great actor-dramatist with round eyes, and ex-

pected him to say something extraordinary every time he opened his mouth. But he only astonished them by saying nothing.

He could talk well, but he seemed to prefer being silent. He was a dreamer. He listened, watched, pondered what he saw and heard. Boileau called him 'le contemplateur.'

To many people such a man seems uncanny. They fear his thought the more for being unspoken. There is an often quoted passage in Donneau de Visé's play of *Zélinde* which brings out this idea. The merchant of the play describes Molière leaning up against the counter of the shop in the attitude of one who dreams. 'His eyes were fastened upon two or three people of quality who were cheapen-

ing laces. He appeared attentive to their talk; and it seemed, by the look in his eyes, as if he would gaze into the depths of their souls in order to learn the things they did not utter. I believe he had a writing tablet and that he put down, under cover of his cloak, anything they said worth remembering. "Perhaps," remarked a bystander, "it was a crayon, and he was sketching their grimaces in order to reproduce them on the stage."'

He was not entirely affable, in the common and superficial meaning of the word. He had lived too earnestly, worked too hard, suffered too much to be merely affable. One cannot imagine him as self-conscious, 'studious to please,' cultivating the ready smile and the look of unctuous

gladness which stamp the manners of the small social politician.

He was noted for independence of spirit. The story of how he abased himself before Montausier rings false, and one is glad to believe that it is only a legend. The phrase 'poor Molière' is made up of ill-assorted words. Unhappy this great man might be and often was or depressed or worried, — in fine, anything save what would be expressed by the pitying adjective 'poor.' The story in question is told on the authority of a note in Saint-Simon's copy of Dangeau. Montausier, says the annotator, was incensed by a gossiping report that he had been held up to public ridicule as Alceste in the *Misanthrope;* and he threatened Molière with a

caning. A threat of this kind was not wholly idle. Granting that Montausier could entertain so brutal an impulse, it must be remembered that there would be many to give him their moral support in the exercise of his privilege. In the Seventeenth Century the right of the aristocracy to beat the lower classes was undisputed. The Earl of Rochester's 'chivalrous' conduct is a matter of history. Being incensed at Dryden, the Earl hired two or three ruffians to cudgel the poet. They are said to have earned their money. This view of the relation of the aristocracy to people who had the misfortune not to be born 'noble,' underwent no change when a new century came in. A Chevalier de Rohan, in 1725,

caned young Voltaire at the door of the Duc de Sully's palace; the Duke thought it very amusing, and shouts of laughter went up when Voltaire challenged the Chevalier.

According to Saint-Simon's note, 'poor' Molière, frightened because of the great nobleman's wrath, knew not what to do. The event turned out fortunately; the Duke was pleased with the dramatic portrait, and sent for Molière that he might congratulate him. The poet 'thought he would die,' and could only be persuaded by repeated assurances that Montausier cherished no ill will. Even then he came 'trembling.' The great Duke publicly embraced the poor player and thanked him.

All this sounds like the veriest

rubbish. Taschereau, a biographer never unfavorable to anecdotage, finds much that is 'evidently false' in the narrative, and thinks Molière is made to play a rôle out of keeping with the dignity of his character. But Taschereau, in the laudable effort to do one of these eminent men justice, seems to do the other injustice. He hints that the publicity of the salutation was chiefly due to fear on Montausier's part, lest all might not have recognized in himself the original of Alceste.

By virtue of his sincerity and thoughtfulness Molière was capable of friendship; and like his fellows everywhere he doubtless knew all phases of the regard continually springing up among those who meet

one another in business, in society, or in the practice and enjoyment of the arts.

Molière's relations with the Prince de Condé and the Maréchal de Vivonne did something to break down contemporary prejudice against actors. Voltaire likens the friendship of de Vivonne and Molière to that of Lelius and Terence. When Grimarest published, in 1706, a response to the criticisms in his life of Molière, he added a paragraph illustrating Condé's attitude towards the poet. It is one of the few anecdotes which destructive criticism has not entirely set aside. Grimarest says, in substance, that Condé greatly enjoyed Molière's society and used often to send for him. Fearing to disturb the poet in his

work he resolved to send for him no more; but he begged Molière to choose his own time and come and come whenever he had a vacant hour. 'I shall leave everything to be with you,' said the Prince. Whenever Molière came Condé dismissed those who were with him and devoted himself to his guest. He was heard to say publicly after one of these interviews: 'I am never wearied when I 'm with Molière. He is a man who furnishes everything; his knowledge and his judgment are never at fault.'

Condé and Molière could meet as man with man. Not so the King and Molière. Yet Louis accorded his subject a measure of kindness almost brotherly at times. Admirers of the poet have exaggerated the intensity of

the monarch's regard. It is charming to think of Molière seated at the King's breakfast-table while Louis carves the fowl and helps his guest first, having summoned the courtiers that they might profit by this lesson in manners. But the legend of the 'en-cas de nuit' is very properly denominated a legend. It is wholly discredited since Depois subjected it to rigorous analysis. That the legend could have come into existence, been repeated by every biographer, made the subject of picture and story, is a proof of popular confidence in the greatness of the King's favor. Admirers of the dramatist are ready to believe any tale illustrative of the monarch's favor. Admirers of Louis XIV are equally positive that the King

could have written *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope* if he had a mind to; but he generously stayed his hand and gave Molière a chance.

Among the poet's intimates were Boileau, La Fontaine, and Racine. The friends used to meet two or three times a week in Boileau's apartment. Their talks were easy and informal, without a trace of the academic. Later a misunderstanding arose between Racine and Molière, but no outsider profited by it, and he did ill who attempted to recommend himself to one of these men by depreciation of the other. Molière praised *les Plaideurs* when not a few were bent upon condemning it. To an officious person who spoke contemptuously of the *Misanthrope*, Racine

said: 'It is impossible for Molière to make a bad play.'

Boileau was Molière's always loyal partisan. They differed on minor critical points, but the full strong current of their friendship encountered no obstacles. Boileau, who wrought with pains and produced in small quantity, admired the spontaneity of Molière's productive power and the precision of his touch. Though younger than his friend he criticised freely and found Molière always patient and amiable under such criticism. When Louis XIV asked Boileau to name the rarest of all the great writers of his century the satirist replied: 'Sire, it is Molière.' The King responded that he did not believe it, and then added with princely good

humor that Boileau ought to know better than he.

With the venerable Corneille the younger dramatist always maintained cordial relations in spite of the efforts made to embitter them against each other. Molière produced a number of Corneille's later pieces, and was open-handed in his financial dealings with the old poet.

Mignard the painter was Molière's life-long friend. To him posterity is indebted for at least one, and it may be two portraits of the author of the *Misanthrope*. With Lulli the composer Molière's relations were less cordial, and in time they ceased altogether. The musician profited by his professional connection with the dramatist, but as his success increased he

became forgetful of his ancient obligation. Incongruous as it appears Molière numbered among his friends two physicians, one of whom, Rohault, was an intimate. The other, Armand de Mauvillain, was suspected of having furnished Molière with notes for the last 'intermède' of the *Malade imaginaire*, in which the ceremony of conferring the degree of doctor of medicine is so brilliantly and mercilessly parodied.

Chapelle, who had been Molière's companion in student days, was a devoted friend and liegeman in the years of the poet's triumph. They were an oddly assorted pair. Chapelle was a Bacchanalian idler who looked upon life as a prodigious jest. Molière drank only milk, toiled like a

galley-slave, and was profoundly serious in his mirth. Chapelle used to spend much of his time at Molière's little country-place at Auteuil, then an isolated village, far from the noise of the city. When the poet was indisposed Chapelle would play the part of host. Auteuil was the scene of that famous supper over which Chapelle presided, and under whose ministrations the guests became sufficiently drunk to be able to maintain the ancient thesis that the highest happiness consists in not having been born at all, and the next highest in dying as soon as possible. Molière was in his own room too ill to join the convivialities. But when one came running to tell him that all his guests, true to their new philosophy,

had gone to throw themselves into the river, the poet forgot his illness and ran after them. He urged upon them the necessity of waiting until morning that they might commit suicide by daylight, bravely, in the face of the whole world, that the moral effect of their heroic action might not be lost. The philosophers hailed Molière's proposition with enthusiasm, and all staggered back to the house.

Security in the affection of his friends, in the regard of the philosophic La Mothe Le Vayer, in the devotion of young Baron the actor, in the worshipping fidelity of old La Fôret his servant, to mention widely contrasting instances, availed little to lift the cloud which darkened Molière's spirits.

The poet's home life was almost unqualifiedly wretched. He had the misfortune to fall in love with a girl twenty-two years his junior, and the want of judgment to marry her. The disproportion in the ages of the pair and the fact that his wife was a coquette, perhaps a dangerous one, poisoned Molière's happiness during those years when this great man could most have appreciated domestic quiet. But the day when men will universally employ vulgar prudence in the selection of their wives will be the day when the word love has ceased to have a meaning. Molière married Armande Béjart because he was desperately enamoured of her. To say that she was completely unworthy of him would be to do her injustice.

She has probably been abused out of reason. To blame her for her youth, her power of fascinating all who came within her reach, her beauty, and her willingness to let it exert that potent force by which beauty everywhere triumphs, is to blame her for the possession of qualities which Molière most adored in her. His fortune was none the less pathetic. He sought for happiness and realized it in a measure; but in its train came suspicion and 'dull-eyed care.'

The history of Molière's wife involves biographical problems wholly outside the scope of this little book. The scandalous charge made against Molière by an envious actor, Montfleury, in a '*requête*' addressed to Louis XIV, was held of so little mo-

ment that Louis himself stood godfather to Molière's first born. The calumny has been none the less persistent because they who best knew the poet rejected it with contempt. The discussion will be found elaborated, in some cases to disproportionate fulness, in all the standard biographies of Molière.

Armande-Claire-Élisabeth-Grésinde Béjart was the youngest daughter of Joseph Béjart and Marie Hervé. Little or nothing is known of her childhood. Coming of a family of actors and actresses and having natural qualifications, she was predestinated to a theatrical career. Molière took the greatest pains with her dramatic training, and, as has happened before and since, fell desperately in

love with his pupil. Their marriage was celebrated February 20, 1662, at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, in the presence of representatives of both families, Molière's father being of the number. The contract antedates the religious ceremony by one month.

Armande entered the troupe of the Palais-Royal that same year, and made her début as Élise in the *Critique de l'École des femmes*. She played the part of Elmire, the wife of Orgon, in *Tartuffe*. In the *Malade imaginaire* her acting of the lesson scene with La Grange was thought to be particularly happy. She was Angélique in *Georges Dandin*, Henriette in *les Femmes savantes*, and Psyche in the tragi-comédie of that name. Her charm was so great in the rôle of Psyche

as to cause the venerable Corneille a momentary flutter of the heart. Mademoiselle de Molière's greatest triumph was in playing the part of Célimène in the *Misanthrope*. Larroumet speaks of it as 'the most famous of her creations.'

Molière's adoration of his wife was so intense as to be pitiful. Their incompatibility brought about long periods of estrangement during which the poet was unspeakably wretched. He freely confessed his weakness under the spell that Armande cast over him. One does not need the testimony of the anonymous author of *la Fameuse Comédienne* to be persuaded that Chapelle and Molière may have had a conversation not unlike the one they are reported to have had in the garden

of the house at Auteuil. Chapelle reproved Molière for his want of philosophy, and being asked whether he had himself ever been in love, replied: 'Yes, in the way in which a man of sense may be.' 'I see very well,' said Molière, 'that you have never loved; you have taken the aspect of love for love itself.'

Always a hard worker, Molière found such distraction as work can give in the varied and exhausting responsibilities of dramatic author, manager, and principal comedian in his own troupe. He was so excellent in each of these departments that you would say it had been 'all in all his study.'

He was an incomparable actor, 'a comedian from head to foot.' Few

men have possessed in higher degree the histrionic gift. 'By a step, a smile, a glance of the eye, a turn of the head, he expressed a multitude of ideas — more than the most energetic talker could have given utterance to in an hour.' He neglected none of the means which are held legitimate in his art. He understood the charm of costume and accessories. Nothing could be more vivid than Madame de Villedieu's description of this great artist making his entrance as Mascarille in the *Précieuses ridicules*. He must have been a fantastic figure with his immense perruque which swept the stage when he bowed, his exaggerated 'canons,' and his slippers completely covered with ribbons. The 'marquis' was mounted upon heels

so high and slender that Madame de Villedieu professed her inability to comprehend how they could in any way support this vast bulk of silk, lace, and powder.

The emphasis in this description is laid upon the fantastic and exaggerated costume; but there is no lack of testimony to show how independent Molière's power was of the accessories of dress and make-up. He was not of that race of comedians whose wit may be chiefly referred to the skill of the wig-maker, the manufacturer of grease-paint, and the costumer.

We associate Molière's name so intimately with comic rôles and have always uppermost in mind his transcendent success in these parts that it becomes difficult to think of him as a

tragic actor. For all that he played heroic and tragic characters the greater part of his life we are forbidden by common consent of the scholars to think of him as a tragedian. It is said that his passion for attempting such rôles was as great as his ability in them was small. Not that the work lacked technical excellence. If I interpret the critics aright they accuse Molière of failing to have been born a tragedian; they never say that he was not an artist. In other words, Molière could summon spirits from the vasty deep, and while the spirits would not always come at his bidding, the formalities of the incantation were perfect.

As an actor he stood for naturalness and simplicity of manner in

opposition to the stilted and conventional school of the art. He opposed the violent type of declamation so greatly in vogue in his day. Noise was a conspicuous element in this acting of the old school. Men strained their lungs to the point of splitting. Marvellous in his power to tear a passion to tatters was Mondory, who literally bellowed himself into apoplexy and died from the violence of his elocution. Molière disliked the bombastic and vehement style of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. He attacked the 'Grands Comédiens,' as the celebrated players of that celebrated theatre were called, and was attacked by them in turn.

He was no less gifted as a drill-master than as an actor. His company

of players may be likened to a perfect instrument in the hands of a skilful musician. He knew exactly how to fit the people to their parts. He studied even their personal prejudices, making use of those undercurrents of thought and emotion too often neglected in the determination of an actor's fitness for a given rôle.

Molière's art was highly profitable financially. He made a great deal of money and kept much of it. Yet he was free and open-handed. His friends prospered through his prosperity. When he died his papers showed to how great an extent he had helped whoever came to him; it was a thousand livres here, and eight hundred livres there, and four or five hundred in some other direction.

He had 'an actor's passion' for luxurious surroundings; though why should we say 'an actor's passion' when so many men not actors display the same amiable weakness? His house in Rue Richelieu was sumptuously furnished. He lived 'like a lord.' This was thought to be infamous; people who did not live like lords, or even like gentlemen, hotly resented the use Molière made of money that he had earned himself. How splendid were his surroundings did not become generally known until 1863, when Soulié published the remarkable volume entitled *Récherches sur Molière*, with its appendix containing among a multitude of documents the inventory of Molière's

effects. This inventory fills twenty-two printed octavo pages.

He loved old books, and was of course reproached for this innocent fancy. Soulié has recovered the titles in Molière's library to about the number of three hundred. At the head of the list are the two books which the poet inherited from his mother, the folio Bible in two volumes, and the Plutarch. The list includes many of the classics, not a little history and fiction, a number of philosophical treatises, travels, and over two hundred volumes of plays in French, Italian, and Spanish.

One might quote almost endlessly from the documents which painstaking scholarship has brought together since 1823, — documents which throw

a flood of light not alone on the details of Molière's history but upon the entire civilization of the times. There is keen pleasure to be had in the dryest of these old papers. For Englishmen and Americans, however, the pleasure is always qualified by the regret that Fate, so lavish in revelations about Molière's life, should have been so strangely reticent about Shakespeare's.

VI

THE *Médecin malgré lui* (1666) was a fresh setting of an old theme. In brillancy and comic force it is unsurpassed. Beginning with September 3 of this year Molière played the *Misanthrope* and the *Médecin* together, 'making his exit in the court costume of Alceste to return in the garb of Sganarelle.'

For the fêtes at Saint-Germain which commenced in December, 1666, Mélicerte (based on an episode taken

from Mademoiselle de Scudéry's *Grand Cyrus*), the *Pastorale comique*, and the *Sicilien*. The first of the three was never finished; two acts only were given in the *Ballet of the Muses*. The *Sicilien* contains the germ of the modern opéra-comique, and is accounted a perfect thing in its way.

In 1668 *Amphitryon* was produced, the piece which made Voltaire laugh so merrily when he first read it that he fell off his chair backwards and had like to kill himself. Taschereau marvels that this play, so broadly comic, so gaily subversive of what are commonly called the proprieties, did not in the least disturb the peace of mind of those sensitive beings who had been deeply offended by the blasphemy of *Tartuffe*. One explanation is that pub-

lic virtue always expresses itself by fits and starts. The critics were a-weary of their strained and unnatural position, and welcomed the opportunity to be normal once more. By an odd circumstance, their hour of moral relaxation came just when they might, with some reason, have knitted the brow and pursed the lips. Episodes of this curious type are constantly recurring. The publication of some book, the production of some play, the exhibition of some picture, will awaken a storm of indignation. Then close upon the heels of the supposed indecency comes a real one; but the public has exhausted its energy, and this time makes no audible complaint. It is said that *Amphitryon* is not delicate, but it is never said that it is not amusing. It

was first played at the Palais-Royal, and had twenty-nine performances. The printed play bore a dedication to the Prince de Condé, expressed in terms not more florid than the custom of the times required. This particular dedication has a note of sincerity quite unusual in pieces of this sort.

In July, 1668, *Georges Dandin* was played before the King and the court. It was one of the many brilliant novelties presented during the fête de Versailles, that great festival with which France celebrated the conclusion of the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. There is an amusing tradition relative to this play. Some friend of Molière warned him that in dramatising the story of *Georges Dandin* he was but giving marked publicity to a similar

drama enacting itself right under his nose; that among the habitual frequenters of his theatre, and more enthusiastic than most admirers, was a veritable Georges Dandin. As a precautionary measure Molière decided to read the play to the victim whom he had unwittingly satirized. The man was so flattered by the honor done him that he failed to recognize himself. They say that Honoré de Balzac took malicious delight in reading to people the studies he had made from them; he had unspeakable joy in their inability to see themselves as Balzac saw them.

On September 9, 1668, *l'Avare* was produced. It had but few representations, and seemed to make its way slowly into the public consciousness;

yet it was not long before the word Harpagon became generic. The play was considered a novelty at the time, because it was a five-act play in prose. There had been a few pieces of this sort, but the rule was that five-act dramas should be composed in verse.

Harpagon is not the conventional miser of old-fashioned plays and romances, who creeps about with a candle late o' nights to gloat over his gold, and whom the footfall of a passer-by throws into an ecstasy of terror. He is more real than one of these, and at once ridiculous and loathsome because so real. He keeps up an establishment, has servants and an equipage, and at least goes through the form of making a figure in the world. But he is constantly retrenching until at last re-

trenchment has become a mania with him. His son has a valet. Harpagon, under the pretence that the valet is spying upon his own financial operations, drives him out of the house, but first he searches the fellow's pockets. It is a supererogatory performance; the pockets are empty, as are all pockets in that household except Harpagon's own. He keeps horses, but he starves them, until they are unable to drag themselves about, let alone dragging a carriage. Maître Jacques, who fills the double rôle of cook and coachman in Harpagon's house, protests that to keep the beasts alive at all, he must take the food out of his own mouth. Jacques is not without courage; he tells his master what the neighbors say about him; for example, that Harpa-

gon has a special almanac printed with twice the usual number of fast-days so as to profit by the rigorous observance of these days in the servants' dining-room.

Harpagon is a fool as well as a miser, and becomes the easy dupe of an adventuress who persuades him that a young girl is in love with him. The older men are the more fascinating to this young beauty, so the go-between reports. The girl actually broke off a match which was on the eve of being celebrated when she discovered that the groom was only fifty-six and did not put on spectacles to sign the marriage contract. Harpagon is overjoyed, and declares that if he had been a woman, he thinks he would have disliked young men, too. He plans a feast for

this marvellously sensible girl whose ideals of manly charm are Nestor and Anchises, but is staggered at the expense he must undergo. Valère agrees to manage the affair. Harpagon trusts him because the youth has taught the miser that beautiful sentiment about eating to live instead of living to eat.

The old miser's frenzy over the loss of his gold is conventional, perhaps, though one must needs have lost a box of money in order to know exactly the feeling, and should be of Latin blood in order to comprehend the greatness of the temptation to be violent at such a juncture.

Farcical as the scenes often are, it is possible to comprehend the state of mind of that Harpagon of Paris who liked to attend performances of *l'Avare*

because it was a play which taught such excellent lessons in economy.

The farce entitled *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* was presented before Louis XIV at Chambord in October, 1669. Like a number of Molière's pieces in this style, the humor of the situations and liveliness of dialogue are set off by a charming embroidery of music and dancing. The poet, though his health was visibly failing, and though he had every reason for wishing to be on good terms with the medical profession, lashed the doctors unmercifully in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. The famous consultation scene is so true to life as to give reason for the belief that the conferences on the weighty subject of the King's health were communicated to Molière by some familiar at

the château to serve him for a model. Nor is it impossible that a hint might have been given by the King himself. Louis once asked Molière what relation he and his physician sustained to each other. Said the poet: 'We talk together. He gives me a prescription which I do not take. Then I get well.' If Louis could suggest to Molière that Soyecourt would make a diverting stage character, no great stretch of imagination is required to picture the King as giving his favorite comic poet a hint of the methods employed by those 'princes of contemporary science,' who had the physical well-being of majesty in their charge, methods concerning which the King himself may have had moments of scepticism.

The monarch not only offered an

occasional hint as to the characters of the plays, he even did Molière the questionable honor to collaborate with him in a spectacular piece — if indeed that can be called collaboration, where the man of letters does the work, and the prince more or less stands in the way of its being rightly done. Louis gave the subject for the *Amants magnifiques*, and perhaps made suggestions as to the conduct of the incidents, which had of necessity to be followed. Such a penalty must one pay for the honor of having a king as a literary coadjutor. Whether due to this cause or not, the *Amants magnifiques* is one of the weakest of the few weak plays with which Molière's name is associated.

It was followed, in October of the same year (1670), by a sparkling com-

edy-ballet, the *Bourgeois gentilhomme.* Of the many characters created by Molière, it may be doubted whether any one is better known than Monsieur Jourdain. He was made to be laughed at and liked. His honest astonishment on finding that he has been talking prose all his life without knowing it, is one of the few expressions from dramatic literature with which the world is perfectly acquainted. King Richard's proffer of his kingdom for a horse is not more familiar.

Psyché, a spectacular piece, written by Corneille, Molière, and Quinault, in collaboration, with music by Lulli, the 'swan of Florence,' was first given at the theatre of the Tuileries in January, 1671. Molière was responsible for the general plan of the piece, and

for the composition of these scenes and passages where there was opportunity for the play of his peculiar wit and vivacity. Corneille, then sixty-five years of age, displayed the tender passion of his poetic youth in the scene where Psyché tells Amour of her love. These parts were assigned respectively to Baron and to Armande Béjart, Molière's wife. Molière himself played the part of a 'Zephyr,' which, considering his age and his figure, seems odd and grotesque enough. This fact has been often cited as a proof of Molière's perfect willingness to sink his own personality and take a minor rôle when there was no place for the exercise of his peculiar quality.

Les Fourberies de Scapin and *la Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* belong to this same

year, 1671. The first of these is taken in part from Terence; it represents a return to the comedy of intrigue, the work of Molière's youth. The *Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* is a picture of provincial manners, drawn with that shade of malice which the best-natured Parisian can be depended upon to make use of when he depicts town ways.

Les Femmes savantes, a five-act comedy in verse, was produced at the theatre of the Palais-Royal, on March 11, 1672. It was intended in part for a satire on the latest intellectual craze, the passion for science and philosophy. Molière was of course more or less unjust, not because it was any part of his nature to be, but because satire in its very quality is unjust. The case must be overstated, or half the effect is lost.

This is altogether true in dramatic and pictorial satire, where exaggeration is the essence. No one believes for a minute that there was any measure of justice in Arbuthnot's description of Marlborough as 'Hocus, the old cunning lawyer,' yet how much spirit and energy would be wanting to that inimitable satire of *Law is a Bottomless Pit* had its author dealt more leniently and delicately with his victims. Molière wished to show the disastrous effect of pedantry in warping a woman's nature from the course Heaven marked out for her. Exactly what course this is, seems to be even yet a moot point. Not every woman who understands Greek is an Armand or Philaminte. Do we not all know of a famous woman of the last century who was none the less

foolish and charming over her dog, and none the less devoted to her husband and her baby, because she was able to read the Fathers in the original Greek! However, Molière's point of view was grateful to many people, and he probably had as much basis for his contention as have the majority of satirists.

The reigning sensation was the philosophy of Descartes. A few understood it, and more than a few thought they did, while everybody talked about it. 'Society' repeated the phrases of the *Discours de la Méthode.* Denizens of the ultra-intellectual circles had Descartes's name continually upon their lips. A typical woman of the salons where the new pedantry flourished was Mademoiselle Dupré, a niece of Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin. She was be-

lieved to be fully as clever as her famous uncle, and altogether free from his intellectual whims. She knew Latin and Greek. 'At a time when Descartes could reckon so many disciples and admirers she was thought to merit the name of la Cartésienne.' Somaize describes her in the *Dictionnaire des Précieuses* as one who has made 'open profession of the sciences, of letters, of poetry, of romance.' She was equipped with a ready knowledge of those things which supplied topics of conversation among the frequenters of the ruelles and salons.

The play of the *Femmes savantes* not only satirized an intellectual movement, but it was believed at the time that two well-known men, a noted scholar and a noted bel-esprit, were

held up to ridicule in its scenes. Playgoers found this piquant. The public is always happy when it is able to identify characters of fiction with real people. The portraits labelled respectively Trissotin and Vadius were not so closely drawn as to admit of no dispute over the question who was the unconscious model for each. About Trissotin there was never much doubt; he was intended for the Abbé Cotin. Molière had a reason for making the attack, and the allusions fit the case so well as to make ambiguity impossible. In the *Femmes savantes*, Act III., scene 2, Trissotin offers the ladies a 'ragout of a sonnet' which has had the fortune to please a certain princess. In the opinion of its maker it is a delicacy well seasoned with Attic salt; he is

convinced they will like it. Trissotin then recites his 'Sonnet à la princesse Uranie sur sa fièvre.' This little piece is found among the *Œuvres galantes, en prose et en vers*, which Cotin published in 1663. The sonnet was actually inscribed to the Duchesse de Nemours, 'sur sa fièvre quarte.' The 'Épigramme sur un carrosse,' which so excites the admiration of Philaminte, is taken from the same volume. These two allusions alone were thought to be sufficient to prove the identity of Cotin and Trissotin.

Ménage was less vulnerable to the shafts of satire than Cotin. He was a man of force of character and of learning. He belonged to several literary coteries, but that in itself is not sufficient to damn an author. They only

are open to an attack who live in the hot-house atmosphere because they have not the stamina to get on in the open air. Ménage was not a man whose powers could be summed up in an epigram or disposed of in a caricature. He had good sense, and he was not without good nature. The Abbé Fabre thinks that Molière was very unjust. At all events, Ménage refused to be made ridiculous. He determined not to recognize himself in Vadius, and he joined heartily in praise of the *Femmes savantes*. The Marquise de Rambouillet asked him if he was going to allow Molière to make a mock of him in that way. Ménage replied: 'Madame, I have seen the piece, and it is altogether charming. It is not possible to find anything in it to change

or to criticise.' Whereupon Molière, not to be outdone, disavowed any intention of attacking the amiable scholar.[1]

Cotin undoubtedly suffered, though he made no reply. A story once circulated to the effect that among the causes contributing to Cotin's death was mortification at the ridicule heaped upon him in Molière's play. Cotin did not die until 1682, that is, ten years after the production of the *Femmes savantes*—a fact which leads Taschereau to observe that mortification must have been for Cotin, as coffee was for Voltaire, a slow poison.

Early in February of the next year, 1673, the *Malade imaginaire* was

[1] *Taschereau*, p. 285.

played for the first time. Molière was now a very sick man, but he remitted neither his efforts for his art nor his sarcastic attacks upon the medical profession. The play was immediately and completely successful. The actor-author himself filled the rôle of Argan. How pathetic and ironical it all was, this unhappy and desperately ill man playing the part of the imaginary invalid!

On the day of the fourth representation, he was so much worse than usual that his friends besought him not to go upon the stage. He answered in his characteristic way: 'What would you have me do? Here are fifty poor work-people who have only their day's wages to live upon. What will become of them if I do not play?'

This, in the opinion of some critics, was but a pretext; Molière was rich enough, they say, to pay for the day he might have taken to be ill in. Probably it was a pretext in a way. Only by thinking of the people dependent upon him could he drive himself to his task. Like all strong men, men who have dominated circumstances, who have raised themselves to places of influence, Molière could endure least of all the thought that the day of his effectiveness might be over. When a man like this, with a passion for work such as Molière was possessed of, once falls behind, he is lost. He knows it, and therefore struggles desperately to keep up. He thinks to outface disease and to shame death. There are illustrations of this thing in the history of

men of action. By making a supreme effort, these great souls have managed to survive a crisis which promised to be fatal. Molière's case, however, was desperate. The effort was none the less courageous because misplaced. Perhaps it was better that this great artist who, from the time when a little child he held his grandfather's hand as they walked to the theatre, had known no thought and formed no ambition which did not centre in the mimic life of the stage — perhaps it was better that he should meet the stroke of death right where he had known the most intense joy of life.

VII

DURING the mock ceremony of conferring the degree of Doctor of Medicine in the *Malade imaginaire*, and at the instant when he was pronouncing the word 'juro,' Molière was taken with a convulsion. He tried to pass it off with a laugh, but even the spectators could see that he was very ill. The performance, however, went on without further interruption. Molière was carried to his home in Rue Richelieu. The vio-

lence of his cough increased until it brought on hemorrhage. Believing the end was near he expressed a wish to receive the sacraments. The great need of the dying man was not sufficient to move the hearts of the two priests who were first summoned. They repeatedly refused to come, though Jean Aubry waited upon them in person to beg their attendance. More than an hour and a half was consumed in this running back and forth. When finally a priest arrived, the third who had been called, it was too late; Molière had ceased to breathe. He died in the arms of two sisters of a religious order, who were at that moment guests in his house.

A wretched dispute arose over the

question of his interment. The curé of Saint-Eustache, taking his stand upon the law which forbade the administration of the viaticum to usurers, 'concubinaires,' sorcerers and players, unless they have confessed and given satisfaction for their notorious offenses, refused to sanction the burial in consecrated ground. A petition was at once addressed to Harlay de Champvallon, the archbishop of Paris, while Molière's wife hastened to Versailles to throw herself at the King's feet, and beg for her husband what these haughty churchmen would refuse him, the privilege of Christian burial. Mademoiselle de Molière, as she was called, was a good actress, albeit not uniformly successful in playing a part on the stage of real life. She had

the temerity to say that if Molière was a criminal his crimes were such as the King himself had sanctioned. We may well believe that bitterness and passion, rather than bravado, moved her to this unfortunate speech. The King dismissed her with but little encouragement. Nevertheless he sent word to the archbishop that the affair must be conducted in a way to avoid noise and scandal.

Consent was finally and grudgingly given to the interment of Molière's remains at Saint-Eustache. The funeral was to be held by night, 'without pomp,' and it was forbidden to carry the body into the church. The act of inhumation on the parish register naturally makes no mention of Molière the actor, only of Molière,

'tapissier, valet de chambre ordinaire du Roi.'

Ugly epithets have been showered upon Harlay de Champvallon because of his attitude in this matter. The instance is one of many illustrating how a man may get a bad name by keeping strictly to the letter of the law. The ecclesiastic whose reputation with posterity was most likely to suffer by a display of intolerance was the one selected through the irony of fate to be the official instrument of an affront to Molière dead. Had the duty fallen to some rigid moralist, a man of the life and temper of Bourdaloue for example, there would have been nothing to say. But Harlay de Champvallon of all men! a prelate who was notorious for his gallantries,

though he unquestionably held sound views on the wickedness of playacting. When he died, in 1695, it was found difficult to get any one to pronounce his eulogy. Madame de Sévigné observed that there were two trifles which made the undertaking an embarrassment to the eulogist: one was the archbishop's life and the other was his death.

If Harlay has been roundly abused he has also been warmly defended. There is no little reason in Brunetière's remarks that the position of those zealous partisans is singular who insist that the archbishop, because he failed in some of his duties, should have transgressed in all. 'In the eyes of the public,' says Brunetière, 'he at least preserved the proprieties.'

On Tuesday, February 21, 1673, at nine o'clock in the evening, the funeral of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière took place. The bier, covered with the pall of the guild of upholsterers, was borne by four priests and followed by a great crowd of mourners. The body was taken to the cemetery of Saint-Joseph and buried 'at the foot of the cross.' After the interment there was an almost prodigal distribution of alms among the poor.

The stone slab which Mademoiselle de Molière placed over her husband's grave was in existence as late as 1732. There is a tradition, in support of which some not wholly convincing arguments have been made, that the body of the poet was surreptitiously

removed from the grave at the foot of the cross, and buried in a remote part of the ground. The tradition gained enough credit to satisfy the commissioners who, in 1792, were authorized by the government to seek for Molière's remains. These gentlemen made their investigation in a place where, according to the best authority, those remains could not have been found. For which performance the commissioners have been accused of 'légèreté et inconséquence.' The relics exhumed at that time, after suffering some neglect, found a resting-place in the garden of the Petits-Augustins, in a tomb erected for them by the pious care of Alexandre Lenoir. Here they remained until 1817, when they were taken to the cemetery of

Père-Lachaise. (Paraphrasing a remark by an eminent scholar, it may be said that this mausoleum in Père-Lachaise, albeit nothing more than a cenotaph, is at least a reminder of the attitude of France towards one of the literary reputations which she holds dearest.)

Molière's theatre remained closed only a week. Three days after the funeral the *Misanthrope* was announced, and Armande made her appearance as Célimène. To any one familiar with the exigencies of theatrical life her conduct needs no justification. The question did not concern herself alone — the existence of a notable dramatic organization was imperilled by the death of its great chief.

In 1677, Armande became the wife of François Guérin d'Estriché, a fellow player. This second marriage is accounted almost a crime by certain devotees of Molière who cannot for a moment stop to realize that the woman upon whom they persistently heap abuse was, after all, the woman whom Molière loved. A son was born of this second marriage. He seems to have been brought up to honor the name Molière. That he was not wanting in ambition would appear from the fact that he courageously attempted to finish Molière's unfinished pastoral of *Mélicerte.*

Molière had three children. His two sons died in infancy. The daughter, Esprit-Madeleine Poquelin, born

in 1665, survived her illustrious father a full half century. At the time of her mother's second marriage she was placed in a convent in the hope that she would choose to remain. But she displayed such repugnance to conventual life that it became necessary to take her home. The presence in the house of a growing daughter was a constant source of annoyance to the always coquettish Armande. The child was a glaring advertisement of the mother's age. Esprit-Madeleine knew this and had the wit to comment upon it. Her father's old friend Chapelle, who for a time had lost sight of her, met her one day and in the course of the conversation asked how old she was. 'Fifteen and a half,' she replied, and then added with a

smile, 'but say nothing about it to mamma!'

In 1705, when she was forty years of age, Esprit-Madeleine became the wife of Claude-Rachel de Montalant, a widower with four children. They who will may credit the romantic story that twenty years prior to this date Montalant carried off Molière's daughter because he could not obtain her mother's consent to their marriage. The authenticity of the story is thought to be extremely doubtful. Cizeron-Rival describes Madame de Montalant as tall, well-shaped, not pretty, but making up for her lack of beauty by her wit. Grimarest, who knew her, speaks of the solidity and charm of her conversation. She died, childless, in 1723.

The history of Molière's posthumous fame offers no anomalies. For the most part it is a record of normal growth and always widening influence. There are few successful dramatic writers the brilliancy of whose reputation has not at some time been darkened by partial or entire eclipse. But Molière appears to have been one of the few. Some fluctuations in public regard may be noted, but on the whole these fluctuations are neither pronounced nor numerous. Molière's fame has never been markedly diminished. He has never been relegated to the limbo of authors who are praised by the critics, and neglected by everybody else.

There was a moment when the King became wearied of the theatre,

as he did of most pleasures and vanities; but this monarch, for whom much of Molière's best work was done, went back in old age with renewed satisfaction to the plays in which he had taken unbounded delight in the days of his youth. Bossuet assailed Molière in phrases which will always be read, and which once read can never be forgotten. But the terrible denunciation leaves us undisturbed in the conviction that the author of *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope* had a deep moral purpose in his work. And in illustration of the liberal spirit of our time it may be noted that the historians of French literature who render most ample tribute to the splendor of Bossuet's qualities never fail to apologize for the severity of the great

orator's attack upon Molière. The Eighteenth Century has been accused of belittling and neglecting the greatest comic dramatist of the Seventeenth. On the other hand the Eighteenth Century produced the first formal biography of the poet, and the earliest of many noble annotated editions of his works. The public, usually so capricious in its literary tastes, has never been alienated from Molière. The great master has risen easily and naturally to the rank of a classic. He has suffered but little from criticism. Admirers are almost in danger of forgetting that it is possible to pick flaws in his art and to question the soundness of his ethics. The attacks upon Molière's literary workmanship are not wholly without reason. Never-

theless there is a point beyond which Academic criticism cannot go; there are reputations which it is powerless to injure.

Trust an Englishman to be severe upon a Frenchman for want of moral sense. Yet it was an English critic who said: 'Of all dramatists, ancient and modern, Molière is perhaps that one who has borne most constantly in mind the theory that the stage is a lay-pulpit and that its end is not merely amusement, but the reformation of manners by means of amusing spectacles.'

The celebrated scholar who explains Molière's popularity by the characteristics of his genius which are summed up in the word 'Gaulois,' does not take account of us who, al-

beit of other race and different traditions, certainly love, and fancy that we understand these marvellous plays. We, too, read and enjoy Molière. We, too, feel his power, though we feel it in our own way. Doubtless we miss something, perhaps much, that a Frenchman delights in. We may not pretend to understand subtilties of humor and expression only to be perceived by a mind saturated from earliest childhood with the French spirit, ideas, language. These things are a Frenchman's inalienable possession, as to us belong certain peculiar pleasures in the reading of Shakespeare, pleasures which neither Gaul nor Teuton can completely understand.

Grant, as we must, that Molière was 'Gaulois' in his fashion of going

straight to old traditional sources of wit, 'Gaulois' in the possession of a temperament equally removed from the romantic on the one hand and the heroic on the other, 'Gaulois' in his frank manner, in his willingness to use the plain word and the daring gesture; it is still true that even in France a goodly measure of Molière's popularity is due to the possession of qualities which appeal to universal human nature. There is that in Molière which all men, irrespective of nation and race, can admire.

The pages of a standard bibliography, like Paul Lacroix's, afford a striking if rude test of the extent of Molière's influence. The section devoted to recording the versions in foreign tongues is most illuminating.

That these plays should have been translated into English and German, into Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, into Polish, Swedish, and Dutch, occasions no surprise. But when we find the *Précieuses ridicules* in modern Greek, the *Misanthrope* in Persian, the *Médecin malgré lui* in Armenian, and the *Mariage forcé* in Turkish, it becomes necessary to readjust preconceived ideas of the size of Molière's audience. These versions are not made at the mere whim of a scholar, as was the version of *Robinson Crusoe* in Latin.

The staple of Molière's comedy is not Gallic; it is the staple of everyday life. He depicts characters that are typical of what may be found everywhere, the world over. He

lashes affectation and vanity in all forms: the vanity of men who pretend to learning they do not possess: the vanity of men who aspire to shine in society for which they are wholly unfitted: the vanity of men whose only claim to distinction is in the extent and variety of their diseases, and who are flattered by doctors and apothecaries as monarchs are flattered by courtiers. Molière shows us country girls infatuated with the reigning literary craze, who try to talk the language of the critics, struggle to be wise in madrigals and sonnets, and at the same time keep perfectly informed on the important questions of washes and cosmetics. He shows us two pedants quarrelling over their respective attainments, and thus emphasizes

anew the fact that learning does not imply culture, and that ability to read the Greek and Latin classics will not insure a man against boorishness.

Molière disturbs us in our belief that politeness is a virtue. Is there not too much of bowing and complimenting, too much of pretentious solicitude about one another's health? May it not be accounted to us for sin that we smile hypocritically when we meet? Is it not better, since we detest cordially, to let our detestation be known? But again Molière makes it as clear as daylight that he who speaks the truth without respect of persons or circumstances not only offends by a rough honesty, but also runs the risk of undoing the effect of his good deeds. And if this plain-

speaker allows his mind to dwell on the sum total of social hypocrisy he is in a fair way to become a misanthrope and a cynic. And in the degree in which he expresses his contempt for mankind he furnishes new occasions for laughter on the part of those who believe that virtue is never so unattractive as when it is militant.

Molière laughs at a dull conservatism which shuts its eyes to scientific progress; which believes that an idea is good because it is old, which would rather be wrong with the past than right with the present; which supposes that truth is of necessity traditional and that all the wise men are dead ages since.

If he ridicules the absurd pretensions of professors of music and dan-

cing, who exalt their several arts at the expense of other and more important studies, he leaves room for the inference that professors of philosophy may be equally superfluous. Musicians talk about 'crotchets,' but philosophers have their crotchets, as well; dancing-masters teach the art of cutting capers, and are perhaps less harmful than they who teach the questionable art of cutting capers with the mind.

One marvels, as he reads Molière's plays, and studies the narrative of his life, that the career of an actor-dramatist devoted to pleasing the public should contain so many elements usually associated with the arts of war rather than the arts of peace. Molière was ever a fighter. He be-

longs to that splendid group of humorists which includes men like Cervantes, Fielding, and Heine, men to whom life is something more than a spectacle. And having courage to fight he was blest in his enemies, whether they were quacks, hypocrites, précieuses, or silly and malignant marquises. Perhaps he suffered more than we know from the hostile attitude of 'society.' Nothing is more galling to a man of genius than the lofty pretensions and condescending airs of people of rank and birth. Society frowned upon Molière because he was an actor. This is inconceivable to us. We sometimes forget, in our more considerate day, how long it has taken the world to get over the idea that actors must be treated in

accordance with the benevolent old English law which classified them as 'rogues and vagabonds' and occasionally flogged them at the cart's tail. Molière, who endured much for his chosen profession, would have been astonished to learn that the day was to come in which actors would be accounted the spoiled children of society, to be petted and indulged without stint. As it was, however, the influence of a powerful King and the possession of transcendent genius were hardly able to secure to this great man the measure of respect from society that was so evidently his due.

Because he was an actor it was impossible for Molière to be elected to the French Academy; it were a waste of words to abuse this famous society

for neglecting to bestow upon the dramatist an honor that was not in its power to grant. He became a member by 'posthumous adoption.' In 1778 Houdon's bust of Molière was placed in the hall where the Academy held its meetings. The learned body did itself no little honor by the inscription engraved beneath:

RIEN NE MANQUE À SA GLOIRE,
IL MANQUAIT À LA NÔTRE.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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In the following note the books and essays on Molière are divided into three groups: —

FIRST: Brief notices in the standard manuals of French Literature.

1. Nisard (D.), *Histoire de la Littéra-*

ture française. Paris, Firmin-Didot. 17e édition. Vol. iii, pp. 84–128.

2. **Godefroy** (Frédéric), *Histoire de la Littérature française :* XVII siècle, Poètes. Paris, Gaume et Cie, 1879. 2e édition, pp. 177–206.

3. **Pergameni** (Hermann), *Histoire générale de la Littérature française.* Paris, Alcan, 1889, pp. 284–294.

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5. **Lanson** (Gustave), *Histoire de la Littérature française.* Paris, Hachette, 1898. 5e édition, pp. 502–528.

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SECOND: Biographies and critical essays.

1. **Taschereau** (Jules), *Histoire de la Vie et des Ouvrages de Molière.* Paris, Hetzel, 1844. 3e édition.

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7. **Lang** (Andrew), Article, 'Molière,' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition.

8. **Brunetière** (F.), *Études critiques sur l'Histoire de la Littérature française.* Paris, Hachette, 1896. In the first series will be found the notable essay entitled 'les dernières recherches sur la vie de Molière;' in the fourth series a study entitled 'la philosophie de Molière.'

9. **Petit de Julleville** (L.), *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature française.* Paris, Colin, 1898. Vol. v, chapter 1. The seventy-two pages devoted chiefly to Molière are by André Le Breton.

The student who follows these slight bibliographical indications will have no diffi-

culty in getting track of what he wants. He would do well to have always at hand *le Théâtre français sous Louis XIV*, by Despois, and *le Théâtre français avant la période classique*, by Rigal. There are innumerable essays on special points, such as Reynaud's *les Médecins au temps de Molière*, and Nivelet's *Molière et Gui Patin*.

THIRD: Direct sources.

1. **Molière** (J. B. P.), *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Louis Moland. Paris, Garnier frères, 1863, in seven volumes. Consult also the monumental edition, by Despois and Mesnard, in the series of 'Grands Écrivains de la France.'

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6. **Grimarest** (Jean-Léonard le Gallois, sieur de), *la Vie de M. de Molière.* Paris, Le Febvre, 1705.

This is the first edition. A reprint under the editorial care of A. P.-Malissis was published by Liseux in 1877. Grimarest got many of his anecdotes from Mo-

lière's friend and pupil, the actor Baron. It has been the fashion for many years to abuse the book. A tempered defence will be found in the appendix of Larroumet's *Comédie de Molière*.

Of the many defamatory pamphlets written against Molière and his wife, two at least must be accounted in a way 'sources.' One is the *Élomire hypocondre*, and the other is *la Fameuse comédienne ;* both can be easily found in modern reprints with notes and critical estimates.

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